



Public Administration Select Committee

Oral evidence: [Accountability of quangos and public bodies](#)

Monday 14 July 2014

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Members present: [Mr Bernard Jenkin](#) (Chair), [Mr Nigel Evans](#), [Paul Flynn](#), [Rt Hon Cheryl Gillan](#), [Kelvin Hopkins](#), [Adam Holloway](#), [Greg Mulholland](#)

Questions 395-497

Witness: Mr Nick Hurd MP, Minister for Civil Society, gave evidence.

Q395 Chair: May I welcome our witness to this final session examining how public bodies are held to account by Ministers and Parliament, and to explore how well public bodies operate in a crisis, and to explore the question of the independence of public bodies, and how Chairs of public bodies are appointed? Could I ask our witness to identify himself for the record, please?

Mr Hurd: Minister for Civil Society.

Q396 Chair: May I just start by asking why, in response to our previous report on this subject, the Government response indicated that you were not really interested in trying to tidy up the categorisation and taxonomy of public bodies, which I think everyone agrees is very complicated, opaque, and does not lend itself to clear accountability?

Mr Hurd: Chairman, we are interested, because we agree. The simple explanation is we see phases of reform. The priority for us in the first phase of reform was to rationalise the estate; there were far too many public bodies, which added to the confusion. Our priority was to reduce waste and duplication, and rationalise the estate. By the end of this Parliament there will be 300 fewer bodies than at the start. That is going to deliver our second objective, which is significant cost savings; we think about £2.6 billion—that is material. In that process we believe we will have improved accountability by transferring over 100 functions. But we are very clear that the analysis is correct: the landscape is still too complex, and the next phase of reform must be about pursuing greater simplification and, with it, an even clearer answer to the question, “Who is in charge?”

Q397 Chair: Can you explain how you are simplifying the categories of public bodies?

Mr Hurd: One of the important things that we have set up in the review process, Chair, is, as you well know, a rigorous process of evaluating public bodies through the triennial review process. We have made a good start and learnt a great deal. But that has introduced a discipline and a rigour into the process, and a forum for some very tough questions about why bodies continue to need to exist and whether their classification is the right one. However, as I hinted in my opening remarks, the Minister for the Cabinet Office and I are minded to go further than that in initiating a rather broader review of the whole issue of classification and taxonomy, because we recognise the reform process has only taken us so far; there is another stage ahead of us, and we will be saying more on that in the future. The views of the Committee and this report that comes at the end of this inquiry will be a very valuable input into that process.

Q398 Chair: I think we are going to be pleased to hear that, and we look forward to contributing our own views about how to simplify this. How much do you accept that there is confusion about why, for example, the Youth Justice Board is an executive non-departmental public body, as opposed to the Arts Council being an advisory non-departmental public body, or that DVLA is an executive agency, and so on?

Mr Hurd: It is too complicated. For our constituents, of course, there is a question about to what degree it matters; they want to know who is in charge and what is going to happen. But the answer to the question, “Who is in charge?” has often, certainly in the past, been too difficult to answer. We think we have improved it, but we are still left with an ecosystem of classifications and blurred lines between them that need further clarification; we totally accept that analysis. However, what we ask for is some understanding that with the first stage of reform in three and a half years we have largely succeeded in some of the most radical reform for a generation, which is how the National Audit Office saw it. That puts us in a stronger position now to aim higher in terms of pursuing greater clarification of this taxonomy.

Q399 Chair: In this vein, may I ask about two public bodies in particular? The Public Works Loan Board—what kind of public body is that?

Mr Hurd: It is effectively, as I understand it—not least in the letter to you from the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury—treated as an executive agency.

Q400 Chair: Because it is part of the Treasury. So why does it still exist?

Mr Hurd: It is under review.

Q401 Chair: How will the new privacy and civil liberties board be established, which is part of this new legislation?

Mr Hurd: It a bit early to say. Those discussions, as you would expect, have just started and are live as we speak; there have been no conclusions reached. However, that process is under way, and the Cabinet Office is discussing with the Home Office what the right approach is. As the Committee will know, we have a more robust and rigorous process now for the creation of new bodies, which effectively require sign-off from the

Minister for the Cabinet Office, and new bodies have been created but on a much, much smaller scale than in the past; I think it is something like 12 new NDPBs since May 2010. Through the initial reform process, through the three tests, and through the triennial review process, I believe we have made a good start introducing a new culture of rigour in asking the right questions, in terms of, “Why is this needed? What is the right basis for setting it up, in terms of governance and accountability?”—not perfect, but better.

Q402 Chair: Are you also reviewing the three tests, which were at the core of the 2010 review?

Mr Hurd: The three tests were, if you like, the shock to the system—the clear signal that new rigour was needed and that fundamental questions needed to be asked to justify the existence of this vast ecosystem of 900-odd public bodies that had been allowed to proliferate over a number of years. Through the triennial review process we are learning, frankly, what the best approach is. The same fundamental questions will still be asked: why does this body need to exist independently of Government? But the process will get refined.

Q403 Chair: But the new privacy and civil liberties board would seem to have a watchdog role that would require some independence, and it seems likely it will be recognised in statute, so should you not be able to tell us what kind of body you think it will be initially?

Mr Hurd: I cannot, Chairman, as I genuinely do not know, and because the discussions are still ongoing. Therefore it would be premature to give any information on that at this stage.

Q404 Chair: Is it not odd that even some non-ministerial Departments are not even established by legislation, such as the National Archives or the Water Services Regulation Authority? These are established by executive decision, rather than by legislation.

Mr Hurd: Yes, the system is full of anachronisms and anomalies, and we have moved mountains to weed some of them out. However, I come back to the starting point: we recognise the need to start a new process that looks at some quite big questions about how bodies are classified, the process for classifying them, and the need for certain categories.

Q405 Chair: How much impact do you think this reform programme has so far had on the accountability of these functions?

Mr Hurd: Improved.

Q406 Chair: How can you demonstrate that?

Mr Hurd: I think over 111 functions transferred. There are certainly fewer bodies around than there were before, which makes it easier. Over 111 functions transferred in different ways, and I think the NAO number is that equates to something like £20 billion of spending now more accountable in terms of ministerial accountability.

Q407 Chair: If you have abolished an executive agency, is that really changing anything? Because an executive agency is intrinsically part of a Government Department anyway.

Mr Hurd: It depends case by case; what I am saying is that to date over 120 functions have moved from NDPBs to central Departments. Executive agencies, all local decision-makers, 280 bodies closed down, over 100 functions abolished in their entirety.

Q408 Chair: But why has this made them more accountable?

Mr Hurd: Because accountability of Ministers and democratically accountable institutions are enhanced. Functions have been more clearly transferred, and that is a process the NAO has recognised in their report.

Q409 Chair: In some evidence we have had from a former Minister, he described how it was easier for him as a Minister to hold to account a public body under the responsibility of his Department than the opaque and dimly lit parts of his own Department who do not produce annual accounts, do not have named individuals in public responsible for their operations, and do not have clearly defined tasks and responsibilities the way that the public body does. Why does abolishing a public body and bringing a function into a Department improve accountability?

Mr Hurd: For example, what the Home Secretary did in relation to the immigration and border controls is a clear example of where there was, she felt, clear evidence that what was in place was not working and made it harder for her to be sufficiently accountable to Parliament, so she brought it in-house.

Q410 Chair: But how can you demonstrate that is not just part of the “something must be done” mentality inflicting itself on organisational change in the public sector, which actually does not really change people’s behaviour or performances? In fact, such reorganisation tends to undermine personal performance and responsibility, because people wash their hands of what happens as a result of the reorganisation.

Mr Hurd: I am not sure that is fair in this particular case. There you had a Home Secretary who realised—and I think we all as constituency MPs realised—the previous system was very difficult to find out who was in charge, so took a bold decision and is going to be accountable for that. To your previous point about a previous Minister talking about their own Department, it is for Departments to get their own house in order and to make the executive-agency system work as efficiently as possible. That will vary, but it is their responsibility.

Q411 Greg Mulholland: Thank you, Chair. Afternoon, Nick. I will just start by expressing collective disappointment on behalf of the Committee, because the Chair asked a question of Francis Maude on 13 May as to a list of unregulated appointments, and the answer to that question was, I am afraid, a classic bit of *Yes Minister*, because the answer came back listing simply those appointments that were regulated, which clearly is not answering the question. The Chair has written again asking for that information; we still have not received it. Could I, first of all, I implore you to chase that and ensure we do have an answer, please?

But the first question to you is that you have made clear already your passion for accountability, which is something you have made clear since your appointment as Minister for Civil Society, and yet surely therefore you would agree with me that it simply is not acceptable to have some public appointments that are regulated, that are covered, and that go through the Commissioner for Public Appointments, and some that do not and are unregulated.

Mr Hurd: If I can answer in two parts, first, in terms of your frustration and disappointment with the response of the Minister for the Cabinet Office, I will of course relay that back directly.

Chair: Could you also relay back that we are somewhat disappointed—no offence to you—that the Minister responsible for the 2010 review could not actually come today?

Mr Hurd: I have anticipated that and communicated it directly.

Chair: It would have been fairer to ask this question of him, seeing as he gave me the answer.

Mr Hurd: Of course I will relay that directly to him. To your substantive question, Greg, I think this issue will form part of this next phase of the review that I talked about, which we are scoping at the moment and which this Committee has an opportunity to shape and influence in your report. You all know the background to this, which is that the role of the Commissioner has expanded over time. They clearly would like a position whereby the default setting is that it is regulated by them. There is not an agreement on that at this stage. I would expect that to be under very regular review. What we do at the moment is a more transparent process, whereby what is regulated is transparent, reviewed effectively every year; representations can be made, but decisions are still taken by Ministers. Whether that is sustainable or not, I do not know, but that is where we are at the moment. The scope and remit continue to increase.

The one point I would make, in defence of the Commissioner, is around proportionality. Given the huge number of people—5,000—sitting on public boards, I think it is quite reasonable to argue, in some cases, it is not proportionate. That was the argument in the case of the Tony Caplin situation. That is the argument, but it is a moving picture. Quite clearly over time, you can see the remit has continued to expand and, as I have said, as part of this review process, which we would like the Committee to help shape, I would expect that to be on the menu of things and questions that we need to keep asking. The other thing I would say is that my understanding is that the Code of Practice, which sits at the heart of what the Commission does, is generally accepted as best practice and what you do across the system, irrespective of whether you are regulated by the Commission or not. That is the understanding.

Q412 Greg Mulholland: On that basis, it seems that you are saying that there probably is a desire to go further, but probably not to cover all public appointments. On what grounds is a public appointment currently regulated and covered, and on what grounds is it not, just so we are clear on what processes are covered and why, and which are not and why?

Mr Hurd: There are some appointments that are clearly not covered, like judicial appointments. That has been the case for ever. My understanding is it is a process

whereby the Commissioner has a list, which is reviewed regularly and published annually in a transparent way. There is a system of representation and negotiation, or discussion, about adding to that list at that moment in time, which seems not a bad process—not what they want, but it is not a bad process. As I said, does it need to be kept under review? We think so.

Q413 Greg Mulholland: I think Cheryl wishes to probe further into the involvement of the Cabinet Office in appointments. If I can just briefly ask, before she does that, do you agree that there is a particularly unsatisfactory and grey area when it comes to reappointments, which clearly are as important, in effect, as an appointment in the first place? Do you agree with Sally Morgan, the Chair of Ofsted, that ministerial involvement in reappointments is a threat to the independence of those public bodies?

Mr Hurd: We all understand the context of those comments, which was clearly a very painful process. What I would say about reappointments is that it actually felt that the culture had become too complacent about reappointments. Actually, one of the things we have done is the process of changing the default setting, so actually the prejudice is against reappointment. That in part has helped us change gears in terms of diversity and bringing new people into the system. Part of the reason why we have been able to move the needle that has been stuck for so long about, for example, the number of women taking up public board appointments is that we are challenging the culture that seemed to be too complacent in favour of reappointments, so that we create opportunities for new people to come in. That, in certain cases, like the one you have just cited, is controversial, but it feels to us like the right thing to do.

Q414 Greg Mulholland: Do you not think there is potential for improving that further and avoiding some of the controversy that happened, through a greater and clearer role for the Commissioner in reappointments?

Mr Hurd: The point of the Commissioner and the Code is that, when a process goes live, it is open, fair and transparent, and based on meritocracy and is seen to be. I do not think anyone is suggesting that the Ofsted process is in some way out of tune with that—far from it. The point I was trying to make was our desire to move away from a system whereby the same people and the same sort of people just got recycled around the UK system of public bodies, because they had the experience. We wanted to challenge that and say, actually, what we are looking for are skills and qualities, not necessarily the fact that you have done this in another place. It is in all our interests to care about it to ensure that we have fresh blood coming into the system, and a more diverse range of people.

Q415 Chair: Sally Morgan's concern was that a job like Chairman of Ofsted, which is intended to provide a measure of independence for that body from the Secretary of State, has that independence compromised if their reappointment depends upon maintaining the good will of that same Secretary of State. Do you recognise that conflict?

Mr Hurd: In that situation, we cannot get away from the fact that it is a ministerial decision.

Q416 Chair: You seem to be saying—I am just testing understanding—that the Government’s predilection is against reappointment per se. Therefore, that would remove that conflict.

Mr Hurd: We are challenging the complacencies that seem to be in the system, which seem to be in favour of just simply reappointing people or reappointing the same sort of people.

Q417 Chair: If you are not going to rule out reappointing people, but you are going to put people on probation for reappointment, depending upon how they behave, how can you possibly then pretend that something like Ofsted is independent of the Secretary of State, when the Chairman depends upon the good will of the Secretary of State to get reappointed? Surely you can see the conflict inherent in that situation.

Mr Hurd: I saw a situation where someone did not get reappointed who clearly wanted to be reappointed in a big political story.

Q418 Chair: Her feeling was that she had not pleased the Secretary of State enough. That may not have been the reason, but it does not matter what the actual reason was. Where you have a Chair of a public body that is deemed to have a measure of independence, and that is why it exists, if the Chairman has to maintain the good will of the Secretary of State in order to get reappointed, does that not compromise the independence of that Chairman?

Mr Hurd: Someone has to decide who is Chairman. The system we have is that the Minister decides, on the basis of their judgment of what is needed for their organisation.

Q419 Chair: You accept that this compromises the independence of that Chair, but that is just a casualty of the system?

Mr Hurd: I do not accept the premise that the independence of Ofsted is compromised by that process.

Chair: If you are in a job and you want to be reappointed—

Mr Hurd: I see a decision that someone did not like.

Q420 Chair: If you want to be reappointed, you are going to be tempted to avoid conflict with the person who will reappoint you. That is just human nature, is it not? “I had better not say that, because he is going to decide next week whether I should still carry on doing this job.”

Mr Hurd: I think that is doing a disservice to the people who are performing those functions. I do not think either the people in stewardship positions and those who took that position, if they are stewards of an independent—

Q421 Chair: Minister, I think you are just in denial on a fundamental point that, if somebody depends upon the good will of somebody else, they are going to adjust their behaviour accordingly if their very existence depends upon the good will of that somebody else.

Mr Hurd: Maybe it just reinforces the point that we are right to try to change the default setting against reappointments.

Q422 Chair: That would be a more logical position, to say, “We are simply not going to reappoint people in order to prevent that conflict arising.” I think that would be a more logical position, but to appoint people on the expectation that they might be reappointed and then to put them under the cosh of, essentially, a politician is surely compromising of their independence.

Mr Hurd: The Committee will reach its own view on that.

Q423 Mr Holloway: You refer to the same sort of people and trying to get fresh blood in—more women and more diverse—which is obviously very welcome, but do you think there is ever a danger that, in doing so, you do not actually end up with the best person for the job?

Mr Hurd: What you have to do is widen the pool of people who are actually thinking about taking on these roles. That is a large part of what the Minister for the Cabinet Office has done to the point of encouraging head-hunters from recruitment agencies to actually get more people thinking that this could be for them. We are not reduced to a small network of people, who just get recycled around doing the same jobs.

Q424 Mr Holloway: Is the priority not always to get the best person to do the job, regardless of whatever else?

Mr Hurd: Absolutely, but it would be nice if we had a broader, more diverse supply of people, in order to form that judgment.

Q425 Mrs Gillan: I would like to understand what goes on inside the Cabinet Office.

Mr Hurd: Me too.

Q426 Mrs Gillan: So you feel you are operating in the dark half the time as well. Let us see if we can shine a few lights into the corners. I understand the Commissioner for Public Appointments who, among other things, ensures that appointments are free of personal and political patronage, as it says in his website, is serviced by the secretariat that is headed by the Director General, Sue Gray. Is that right?

Mr Hurd: Let us assume, for the purpose of this question, that is right.

Q427 Mrs Gillan: Fair enough. I was going to say, could you explain to me what the Director General, Sue Gray, does, because I believe she is also the Head of Private Offices and the Director General of Propriety and Ethics?

Mr Hurd: She fulfils both those functions.

Q428 Mrs Gillan: Is there any conflict in that role between servicing the impartial Commissioner for Public Appointments, which ensures fairness and openness, and also acting as the Head of Private Offices of all Ministers?

Mr Hurd: Not that I am aware of.

Q429 Mrs Gillan: Okay, fair enough. Can you tell me what services are provided out of the Cabinet Office appointments section?

Mr Hurd: To whom?

Mrs Gillan: To the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Mr Hurd: I will have to write to you to give you the exact detail on that, Cheryl. As you know, we have our own centre for public appointments, which I am more familiar with, whose job is to try to support other Departments to run processes that are as efficient and effective as possible. On the exact detail of the support that the Commissioner gets from the Cabinet Office, I am going to have to drop the Committee a quick line. I do not want to misrepresent it.

Q430 Mrs Gillan: I would be really grateful, because I would just like to understand how that meshes together and exactly how many members of staff there are within that Department, what their roles and responsibilities and their grades, etc, are.

Mr Hurd: Since you are asking for detail, I will provide the Committee with that. It would be quite helpful if that request could be crystallised in some clear prose, so that you get as substantial a response as you seek.

Q431 Mrs Gillan: The Clerk to the Committee will do that. Can I just ask you something very bluntly? Have you ever had a file across your desk that is concerning appointments that are about to be made for you to have a look at?

Mr Hurd: Only in relation to the Charity Commission, where I had some responsibility, but right at the end of the process. As you would probably guess, Cheryl, this is not an area in which I have any real active involvement.

Mrs Gillan: That is why it is disappointing—

Mr Hurd: I am sure, through me, all questions can be put to the Minister for the Cabinet Office, and I will do my best to make sure that the replies you get are substantive.

Mrs Gillan: It is disappointing that we do not have him here to answer these questions.

Mr Hurd: I can feel your frustration.

Q432 Mrs Gillan: I also need to pass back and ask this question: I want to know what other Ministers have these files put across their desk. I would like to understand; there appears to be either formal or informal involvement. This Committee needs to understand what that formal and informal involvement is. It seemed like it was the easiest way to ask

you, if you had across your desk ever any files containing public appointments and names for public appointments, before those appointments were actually made.

Mr Hurd: Only in the context of the Charity Commission. Recently for the role of the chief executive, I was given a list at the end of the process.

Q433 Mrs Gillan: If through you we could also have that question asked of your colleague in the Cabinet Office, certainly from what we have seen there is some understanding that there may be either a formal or an informal involvement, and I would like that confirmed, explained or denied. That would be helpful to the Committee in understanding the process.

Mr Hurd: Yes, that is absolutely fine.

Q434 Chair: May I just follow that up, because neither the guidance issued by your Department on public appointments, nor the Public Appointments Code of Practice, envisages any role for the Minister for the Cabinet Office in those appointments? I am correct in that, yes?

Mr Hurd: Could you repeat the question?

Chair: Am I correct?

Mr Hurd: Could you remind me what the question is?

Chair: That neither in the Cabinet Office's own guidance, nor in the Public Appointments Code of Practice, is there any role specified for the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

Mr Hurd: Appointments are made by the relevant Minister in the sponsored Department.

Q435 Chair: There is no Cabinet Office approval required for any of those appointments?

Mr Hurd: Not that I am aware of. We play an active role in making sure the processes are, as I said, as efficient and competent as possible, and we push Departments quite hard on that point. It could not be clearer: the appointments are made by the relevant Minister in the sponsored Department. It is their responsibility to conduct the recruitment.

Q436 Chair: The Prime Minister takes a personal interest in some of those appointments; is that correct?

Mr Hurd: It is no secret, of course, that No. 10 is always interested in making sure—

Q437 Chair: Presumably the Cabinet Office supports the Prime Minister in that role of approving or not various public appointments?

Mr Hurd: We support No. 10 in a number of roles, including making sure the recruitment processes across the system are robust.

Q438 Chair: Is the Minister for the Cabinet Office responsible for making recommendations to the Prime Minister about those appointments?

Mr Hurd: Pass. You will have to ask him.

Q439 Chair: We would like to have asked him, but he is not here, which is why we are asking you.

Mr Hurd: Could you add it to the list?

Q440 Chair: We will add it to the list. Given that there is no role for the Minister for the Cabinet Office, it would be invidious, would it not, if the Minister for the Cabinet Office had somehow obtained a role, on behalf of the Prime Minister, that was seen to be the Minister for the Cabinet Office not acting on behalf of the Prime Minister? That would not be right, would it?

Mr Hurd: As I say, please send me your list of inquiries and I will make sure you get a substantive response in relation to what the Minister for the Cabinet Office does and does not do.

Q441 Chair: Can I just ask another factor about diversity? You have been talking a lot about the need to attract a wider client base of people into public appointments. How has the Cabinet Office been doing? What do your figures show?

Mr Hurd: We are quite pleased without, I hope, making the mistake of being complacent. We are doing better on women than we are on BMEs. If you look at the numbers over the last eight to 10 years, the number of women appointed to the boards of public bodies has stayed pretty static, around 36%. In the first six months of the last financial year, which is to September 2013, 45% of new public appointments made by Whitehall Departments were women. The data for the second half of the financial year are being collected and will be published very soon. As I have said, we appear to have moved the needle from being stuck at around 36% to 45%. We have set ourselves a target of 50% and we are hopeful that we will continue down that path. We are certainly working very hard to increase the proportion of women appointed to boards and are having some success.

Q442 Chair: Moving on to the question of accountability, in the Government's response to our report in Jan 2011, *Smaller Government: Shrinking the Quango State*, in which many of our witnesses argue that there should be a greater role for Select Committees in monitoring the activities of public bodies, the Government responded by saying, "The Government is keen to encourage more robust Select Committee scrutiny of public bodies". How is the Government encouraging that?

Mr Hurd: We have probably not done enough is the honest answer. Obviously, Parliament will have a view on that and is free to propose things as well, but, certainly in the area of pre-scrutiny of key appointments, there has been some progress, perhaps not as much as this Committee would like, but there has been some progress in that area. It probably fits into that bucket of things that could be done better and should be on the menu of things to discuss in this review, which I talked about at the top.

Q443 Chair: One of the suggestions made to us in this inquiry is that, when it comes to the reappointment or not of Chairs of public bodies, Select Committees might be involved. Peter Riddell has suggested this. He said, “Committees might be involved in a more formal process of appraising the performance of appointees”. That is the reappointment of appointees.

Mr Hurd: Again, that should be part of the discussion in this next phase. That is my personal view, but I would encourage the Committee to be bold in its recommendations as to what should be within the scope of that review.

Q444 Chair: On the question of the accountability to Parliament, in respect of parliamentary questions, it has become quite normal for Ministers to seek a letter and publish a letter in Hansard, from the Chair of that public body. In a recent exchange of correspondence between the Leader of the House and the Procedure Committee, the Leader of the House has re-emphasised that how that is done is a matter for the Ministers concerned. Would you agree that, ultimately, if the Minister is providing the space in *Hansard* for the response, the Minister remains accountable for the quality and content of the response, whether the words were in the Minister’s own name or were in the words of the Chairman of that public body?

Mr Hurd: I would agree with that, Chair, not least because, if colleagues are unhappy with that response, then the systems are in place for them to pursue that unhappiness ultimately to the Minister, so the answer to the question is yes.

Q445 Chair: How, then, does bringing the function into a Department improve the accountability, if the accountability is already there, as you have just said?

Mr Hurd: In the context of letters?

Chair: If the Minister is taking responsibility for the parliamentary answer and, therefore, taking responsibility, being accountable, for the conduct of that public body, why is a public body, as a public body, any less accountable than part of a Government Department?

Mr Hurd: They are ultimately accountable to Parliament through Ministers

Chair: Agreed.

Mr Hurd: What we have is, as you well know, a spectrum of independence from Government through this over-complicated taxonomy that we are trying to rationalise and simplify.

Q446 Chair: There are some non-ministerial Departments—for example, the Charity Commission—which has a direct accountability to this Committee, for which nevertheless Ministers answer parliamentary questions. Why is that?

Mr Hurd: That is what we have set up. It is not ideal. Again, that should be part of the review, but this Committee probably has a great body of understanding about the workings of the Charity Commission and is free to ask anything it wants of it. Through your reports and through the work of whoever sits in my job, we have pretty decent scrutiny of the Charity Commission, if that is what your concern is.

Q447 Chair: Who is actually accountable to Parliament for the performance of the Charity Commission?

Mr Hurd: At the moment, ultimately the Minister for Civil Society.

Q448 Chair: Even though expressly in the legislation there is a direct accountability to Parliament, in order to provide for its genuine independence?

Mr Hurd: Someone has to account for Parliament, and the system we have at the moment says that it is Ministers.

Q449 Chair: In the case of the Electoral Commission, for example, an MP who serves on the Electoral Commission answers questions on behalf of the Electoral Commission. Why does that arrangement not apply to the Charity Commission?

Mr Hurd: No one has proposed it yet, and it has not been part of the debate around the accountability of that body.

Q450 Chair: You also answer questions in respect of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. Is that correct?

Mr Hurd: I do not, but on the Big Lottery Fund I would.

Q451 Chair: If there was a question to Government about the activities or performance of the PHSO, it would be answered by a Minister.

Mr Hurd: By the Cabinet Office, yes.

Q452 Chair: That might be in the same category, but particularly the PHSO is actually an Officer of Parliament. Are these ideas you are prepared to consider?

Mr Hurd: Our view is—and I come back, if I may, to the start—we have had our heads in three and a half years of very intense, radical reform of a system that had drifted hopelessly in the wrong direction, in terms of waste, duplication, inefficiency and poor answers to the question of who is in charge. We think we have made a great deal of progress and we are delighted the NAO seems to support us in that, in just three and a half years. We are very clear and very candid that that is just the first phase. The second phase is arguably a bit more complicated, but there are some big questions out there in terms of how we simplify this further and if there are ways in which we can improve accountability. That is why this inquiry and the report that follows it are well timed and very welcome, as far as we are concerned.

Q453 Chair: Another part of the accountability of public bodies is their operational transparency. Why do most non-departmental public bodies still not hold public board meetings or publish their minutes?

Mr Hurd: There may be some cases where they cannot, but the more important answer to your question is the direction of travel is absolutely in favour of greater transparency.

What I expect, what we are putting in place, is as these triennial reviews evolve—and as I said, we are learning a great deal—we are building into those processes greater requirements for transparency.

Q454 Chair: For the last year in which figures were available, 2012-13, 63% of NDPBs published an annual report, which is the same as the previous year; 40% made minutes of board meetings available, which is down from the previous year; and 19% held board meetings open to public, which again is down on the previous year. What comment do you have on that?

Mr Hurd: That is not enough, which is why we are building into the triennial review process a greater focus on transparency, which goes with the grain of everything else we are doing across the system to try to throw more light into the system. We take some pride in that, and public bodies have to be part of that process as well.

Q455 Chair: Only 14% of NDPBs complied with all three of those stipulations, and that was down on the previous year. The proportion of NDPBs meeting none of these measures remained the same at 24%. This is not a very good performance, is it, Minister?

Mr Hurd: I have already said it is not good enough. The triennial review process is our mechanism for that.

Q456 Chair: What action are you taking to improve this performance?

Mr Hurd: Making it a more emphatic and important part of the triennial review process.

Q457 Chair: What has gone wrong with the supervision of these bodies by their sponsoring Departments that we have seen this decline in openness and transparency?

Mr Hurd: On a case-by-case basis, it may be different. My general point is that we are, after just three and a half years, still not where we need to be in terms of changing the culture around transparency. The triennial reviews are an opportunity to push harder, which is exactly what we will do.

Q458 Mrs Gillan: I just want to probe a bit more on the role of the Cabinet Office. In the course of this inquiry, we had some written evidence from Professor Skelcher and Dr Tonkiss that suggested that sponsoring Departments had a tendency not to prioritise their relationship with public bodies, and were delegating those tasks to junior Ministers, junior officials, etc. Do you think that that observation is accurate, in your experience?

Mr Hurd: Yes.

Q459 Mrs Gillan: Why do you think this is? Obviously, junior Ministers and officials lack the status or the expertise to be able to deal with these bodies, which are often spending large sums of money.

Mr Hurd: The simple answer is that not enough importance has been attached to it in the past. We all know that what we are trying to reassert is that these public bodies are important; they are really important partners in terms of delivering the Government's

priorities. These relationships need to be managed properly, both at the top at the organisations, but also critically at the official level. Probably—in fact certainly—there has been too much complacency in the past about the kinds of skills, development, training and picking of the right people to perform those functions, which is why, in terms of the civil service training, we are building in a new sponsorship specialism, to use the jargon, with bespoke training as part of the civil service learning for people performing those roles. We have put in place a new cross-Government senior champion, Catherine Lee, who is a DG at the Ministry of Justice, to raise the profile of sponsorship across Departments. It is a really important role.

I know from my personal experience that the official who was responsible for the relationship with the Big Lottery Fund, a very important relationship, was an absolutely first-class civil servant, who has gone on from that role to a quite significant promotion, because of her effectiveness in that role. You need more of that across the system, whereby it is recognised that this is a really important role. You need training to do it. You need proper supervision in it. If you succeed in it, you go on to even greater things. I do not think the system has attached enough importance in the past to managing these relationships, because we know, when things go wrong, whatever structures you put in place, whatever governance you put in place, at the end of the day, it is human relationships that are likely to get you through it.

Q460 Mrs Gillan: What you are saying to me is that you have noticed there is a lacuna and you have appointed somebody in MOJ. You are starting to address a training programme, but the concerns of the experts who gave evidence to this Committee were that there was still a great deal to do, because of the high level of turnover in the civil service. Do you think that that is affecting it? This does not sound like the most exciting area to be involved in, if you are coming in as a fast-tracker.

Mr Hurd: That is what we have to change. I have not heard it expressed as a problem as results from turnover. I just do not think it is being given enough importance, and that is why I think that example of the official who I work with on the Big Lottery Fund is a good example of what should happen if you get an important job like that right.

Q461 Mrs Gillan: Have you identified within the Cabinet Office the sponsoring Departments that are worst at it? Do you have a ranking system? Have you prioritised?

Mr Hurd: No, not yet. The honest truth is we know it is a system where there are really no questions being asked, in terms of how this whole system worked. You know very well there is only so much you can achieve in three and a half years, and we are learning as we go along about what is important. What I am signalling is that we have recognised, if you like, this human dimension of managing these relationships has been underestimated in the past. We are putting in place some steps to correct it. Whether they are sufficient I am not sure yet, but we are getting on it.

Q462 Mrs Gillan: It would be fair to say that the Cabinet Office now has a major role between public bodies and sponsoring Departments. Would that be fair to say?

Mr Hurd: Yes, there is more of a central strategic role, in terms of encouraging Departments to sharpen their act, in terms of triennial reviews and encouraging them to embrace this higher profile and importance that we attach to the relationship management.

Q463 Mrs Gillan: How do you monitor that to make sure that it does not go wrong? It has been suggested to us that there is a sense that there are now three in the marriage, with these outside bodies having to look both to the Department and to the Cabinet Office, with the Departments often acting as messengers between the two sides—between you in the Cabinet Office and the outside bodies. Is that a fair reflection of where we are now, at the moment?

Mr Hurd: As you well know, Cheryl, there will always be people who think the Cabinet Office is overstepping the mark and treading on departmental toes. In this area, we are very keen to respect and remind the Departments of their responsibilities. Given the past where we do not think there was enough of a central strategic function or purpose or support, really, for Departments to get better, we make no apology for being very energetic in this area. It is needed to drive the culture change that is necessary.

Q464 Mrs Gillan: We had some written evidence from Timothy Hornsby, who was a former Chair of a public body. It said: “The Cabinet Office appears to interfere significantly with the independence of public bodies, notably over procurement”, but went on to reflect that the Cabinet Office’s “grasp of the reality [...] on the ground seemed [to be] tenuous”. Obviously that is one individual, but as it is evidence that is provided to us, we have to look at that seriously. What I am saying to you is, how do you have a check and balance on yourself? How do you become not the Department that interferes and become the Department that enables or creates a new strategy and direction? At the moment, the evidence we are getting is that you tend to be an interfering Department.

Mr Hurd: You will always find people who say that, Cheryl. You know that this balance is extremely hard to get right, but if Francis was here I am absolutely sure he would point to results, not least in the procurement area, where we had to grip a system that was hopelessly inefficient. As a result—the audited numbers through the efficiency and reform programme—we have crystallised over £13 billion of savings that do not have to be found elsewhere, through that process. This tight/loose balance is a very difficult one to strike, but we can point to results. There will be people who were upset in that process. That is inevitable.

Q465 Mrs Gillan: You do not mind breaking a few eggs to make your omelettes?

Mr Hurd: Frankly, no. In the business of culture change, sometimes you have to upset people.

Q466 Chair: What you seem to be saying is that we know that Whitehall is fundamentally a federal system, where the Departments themselves tend to be where the focus of power is. They are accountable through their Secretaries of State to Cabinet. The Cabinet Office appears to be taking more of a directing role in some aspects of the work of Departments and the work of arm’s-length bodies. Is that correct?

Mr Hurd: There is some direction, but there is also an enabling role, for example in this particular area of sponsorship management: creating the training module; creating the learning networks, where people can come together; creating the best practice. That is a very sensible function for the centre to play.

Q467 Chair: There seems to be a consensus in favour of the Cabinet Office adopting that role, but there seems to be less consensus that the Cabinet Office should adopt a more coercive role, in respect of the procurement mandates, for example.

Mr Hurd: Sometimes you have to push. For example, I look at the triennial review process, which is fundamental to reform. We make no apology for sticking very, very close to that to make sure that those are run rigorously, that there are some robust people chairing that process, so that it is not a soft cushy internal process, just to get the Cabinet Office out of our hair. We have to be tenacious in terms of pursuing the course, which is trying to get to a point where our public bodies system is leaner, more efficient and more accountable.

Q468 Chair: Where the Cabinet Office clearly has the authority to take a more overt leadership role in some aspects of administration across Government Departments, what does the Cabinet Office do to ensure that it is winning consent for this, rather than just overriding the wishes of Departments?

Mr Hurd: That is a question much better directed to the person leading that effort, who is the Minister for the Cabinet Office. My observation is that there are arguments and there are sharp elbows—

Q469 Chair: What lessons should we take from the fact that, very often, the directing role of the Cabinet Office finishes up with rather adversarial comments surfacing in the public, which suggests that everyone is at daggers drawn and there is a lack of co-operative effort in Whitehall to achieve what most people want to achieve? What lessons should we learn from those episodes?

Mr Hurd: I am not going to comment on those. I come back to the point that, if you are in the business of reform, which we are, you are not going to carry everyone with you. To keep the momentum up, you do have to have the need for a strong centre that challenges and holds people to account, as well as provides the support and the enabling functions that we have talked about before, otherwise I do not think you will get the change that you need. The definition of success, of course, is if the system then takes it forward themselves. We have not been in that situation as far as the triennial reviews.

Q470 Chair: If Departments themselves begin to feel that their responsibility is being taken from them, who is accountable for what goes right and what goes wrong?

Mr Hurd: If that is the outcome, and I do not think that is the general feeling across the system, then clearly that tight/loose balance has been got wrong. What you want is Departments to take responsibility and ownership, and to drive things forward themselves. In the first early stages of reform, there needs to be some push, but there also need to be tools that the centre can provide to support Departments in that.

Q471 Chair: That is the second occasion in which you have used this term “tight/loose”. Can you explain what you mean by that?

Mr Hurd: It is an expression the Minister for the Cabinet Office uses.

Chair: I am sure they do, but what does it mean?

Mr Hurd: It means getting the right balance between having tight control at the centre and letting go enough to allow operational independence, so trying to keep tighter control at the centre, for example over procurement and costs, and taking to the centre what you can in the name of efficiency, while letting go of what you feel comfortable letting go of and what you think is the right thing to let go of.

Q472 Chair: We spent much of this session discussing the accountability of public bodies in their relationships with their sponsoring Departments, and the accountability through Ministers and the answering of parliamentary questions. Does not the directing role of the Cabinet Office, in part of this relationship, undermine that accountability?

Mr Hurd: I think it has been overstated, to be honest. You will always unearth some voices who are unhappy about the role that we play, but this process that we are talking about is being driven and led by the Departments. We just have a central strategic function, which is about nudging, encouraging, supporting, goading, asking tough questions—just pushing it along.

Q473 Mr Evans: And, in the end, forcing?

Mr Hurd: If we do not think a process is robust enough, we will tell a Department. If we do not think a triennial review process is being set up in the right way, we will say so.

Q474 Mr Evans: The buck has to stop somewhere and people need to know where the responsibility, where the line of command, is. I know you said about consensus, but you do not always get consensus. You have to accept that. There will be some people there trying to stymie what you are trying to do. They think perhaps it is not in the best interest and they will try to prevent that from happening. When you try all this goading, pushing, nudging, encouraging, in the end, if you do not think that it is working, you have to force.

Mr Hurd: Well—

Chair: Minister?

Mr Hurd: It depends on the situation you are talking about. In most situations, ultimately it is the Department that decides. It is the Secretary of State who decides, but our role is to try to support them to be as good as they can be.

Q475 Chair: In the academic research that has been conducted into the relationship between arm’s-length bodies and their Departments, Professor Flinders and Dr Tonkiss have quoted an official based in one non-departmental body as saying that the relationship has “gone from an arm’s-length relationship to more of an arm-lock”. What is your reaction to that?

Mr Hurd: You will always smoke out some professors and people who will give you nice quotes like that and tell you things—that we are all dreadful people. Our mantra is that we are here to help and that is our approach, but this is a reform process and it does not happen by osmosis.

Q476 Chair: Are your reforms aimed at providing better strategic control of public bodies or are they just applying controls and increasing the bureaucratic process, in order to make it more difficult to spend public money?

Mr Hurd: The key thing is to make sure these triennial reviews work.

Q477 Chair: I do not think that is what we are talking about. There are day-to-day controls over things like procurement, which are making it very much more complicated to run a public body independently of Government, which presumably is what an arm's-length body is meant to be: to have a degree of independence. If the long screwdriver from the Treasury wants to operate in these public bodies, why have they been made independent?

Mr Hurd: Are we talking about the spending of public bodies?

Chair: Spending would be one thing.

Mr Hurd: On the challenge we face about trying to drive greater efficiency across the wider public sector realm, and trying to make sure that every pound of our constituents' tax money is spent in the most efficient way possible, I do not think you can immunise arm's-length bodies from the process of challenge that we have set up across the system. They are just pursuing efficiencies.

Q478 Chair: One thing we discovered from the Environment Agency—incidentally misnamed; it is not an agency—is that it is much easier to spend capital rather than revenue on maintaining something. It is much easier to renew something with a capital sum than it is to spend revenue on maintaining something. I gave the example of sea walls in my constituency. The Chair of the Environment Agency completely agreed and said that this was something that needs to be addressed. This would seem to fall under the definition described by Dr Tonkiss of “a tension between the nature of parliamentary accountability which rests on the assumption that bodies which spend public money are held to account by representatives of the public, and the rather more hidden bureaucratic processes of gaining approval from the Cabinet Office”. Do you understand that, actually, the interference of the Cabinet Office could be undermining public accountability?

Mr Hurd: No. That is the first time I have been confronted with that charge. I have not heard it elsewhere. There are plenty of people who do not like the challenge, but challenge is what we need.

Q479 Chair: I am all in favour of challenge. What I am not in favour of is hidden control, which actually results in perverse outcomes, for which the Chair of the public body concerned, in this case the Chair of the Environment Agency, actually disclaims responsibility. He is not accountable, he says, for the fact that it is harder to spend public money on maintaining a sea wall than building a new one.

Mr Hurd: I am outside my area of expertise, Chairman. I am not sure whether that is an issue for the Treasury or the Cabinet Office.

Q480 Chair: That is a reasonable point, actually. I think it underlines the complexity of the role of the centre, taking too much directive control over what are intended to be arm's-length bodies, with a measure of control over their own functions. You would agree?

Mr Hurd: I agree we have a very complex landscape—too complex.

Q481 Mrs Gillan: Can I just say I am also worried about the resources? The Cabinet Office is not flush with officials.

Chair: Oh yes, it is.

Mrs Gillan: Oh no, it isn't. What worries me is how you follow up. When we get evidence to us that there was a lot of pressure put on a body because they would not sign up to a shared service agreement, which they considered was not fit for purpose, a lot of time was wasted. How on earth do you and your limited band of officials follow it through? Is it not true that then the Secretary of State for the Department stands there holding the baby when, in fact, you might have been the agent for withdrawing the sustenance to the baby, so it could not perform?

Mr Hurd: Cheryl, I honestly do not know about that specific.

Q482 Mrs Gillan: You are not accountable for the body. The body is accountable to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State stands at the Dispatch Box and answers the questions, but it could have been your interference that actually produced a poorer performance from that agency, because of what you were insisting on by putting yourself between the Department and the arm's-length body.

Mr Hurd: I do not know of that particular instance, and I am riling at the word "interference". In the system that we have set up—and again we have to remember the context of having to squeeze huge amounts of money out of a system that was very inefficient—we have had to introduce new controls and challenges. They have generated billions of pounds of savings, which I do not think would have materialised otherwise. That is the result of this process. These are savings we do not have to find elsewhere. If anyone thinks that these were just going to happen naturally, without some stick, without some challenge, they are kidding themselves.

Q483 Mrs Gillan: Would you admit that a proportion of those could possibly have resulted in less efficient operations, in some instances?

Mr Hurd: I do not know. All I know is the overall picture is that we are moving gradually towards a more efficient public realm and that is not easy, given where we are, not least in terms of the public-bodies landscape, which was drifting hopelessly in the wrong direction. A lot of these questions are much better directed at the Minister for the Cabinet Office, because you are taking me into areas where I just do not have day-to-day experience or responsibility.

Q484 Chair: Just moving on to the final topic, what have you noticed about the relationship between public bodies and their sponsoring Departments at times of stress or crisis?

Mr Hurd: I do not have any unique insights beyond what you have observed on your television screens.

Q485 Chair: Can I suggest that, actually, this is what we tend to notice. whatever independence has been invested in the public body? Take the Financial Services Authority, which was an independent regulator. Come the banking collapse it becomes immediately something that is completely subject to the—I will not say the whim of Ministers. That would be invidious, but it becomes an extension of ministerial fiat. Is that not fair?

Mr Hurd: I do not think so. The more recent example is the Environment Agency in the floods, where the tension was played out publicly. You are going to have tensions, Chair, in a system where ultimately the Minister is accountable to Parliament and the public. Obviously in those situations that are stress-testing the system to extremes, you are going to have a desire for information, knowledge and all hands on deck, with Ministers getting keen to help and keen to know. These tend to play out publicly, but let us not forget that that is at the extreme end of the stress test of the system.

Q486 Chair: What we noticed about the Environment Agency, in fact having now studied it quite closely, was that the relationships between the Chair of the Environment Agency and the Secretary of State, and the working relationships at departmental level, were stress-tested and operated quite effectively. It was when another Minister became involved, who did not have a close working relationship, when perhaps the wrong things were said. What role does the Cabinet Office therefore have in promoting trusting and open relationships between the personnel in a sponsoring Department and the public bodies they are responsible for?

Mr Hurd: There are limits. We have spent a lot of time talking about interference from the Cabinet Office. There are limits. Ultimately you have to leave human beings to manage their own relationships. What we have put in place is what I have mentioned, which is a clear message that this matters more, some new tools to help people train their people to higher levels of effectiveness at the official level, and a DG charged to go round the system championing this role. The signal has been sent to the system: this matters more; you need to pay more attention to it. I would have thought any Secretary of State, looking at those examples, as you have said, will be asking the question, are we doing the job in managing our relationship?

Q487 Chair: In terms of where the Cabinet Office might best apply its effort, why does the Cabinet Office not spend more time supporting, mentoring and facilitating positive and trusting working relationships between public bodies and their sponsoring Departments, and rather less time in generating the pushback because of some of the things being regarded of the Cabinet Office as interference, arm-locking, etc?

Mr Hurd: Chair, in this particular instance, actually almost everything we are doing is around enabling and supporting, including best practice, creating networks whereby

people, not least the chief executives of public bodies, can come and share their stories and examples.

Q488 Chair: Could you give us an example of that?

Mr Hurd: I would have to write to you on that, but that is definitely part of what we do. It is to create spaces and networks where people can come and actually talk about it in a sensible way.

Chair: I would be very grateful if you could give us a bit more on that.

Mr Hurd: I think it is very important and I may write to you on that.

Chair: I do not think I have any further questions.

Q489 Paul Flynn: Could you give us examples of where these savings have been made that have later proved to be expensive, where loss has resulted from them, or was it all perfection?

Mr Hurd: The savings I have referred to are the savings generated by the efficiency and reform group of the Cabinet Office.

Paul Flynn: Like the Passport Office, for instance?

Mr Hurd: They published a report, which is effectively an audit as well, which I am more than happy to share with the Committee, but I imagine the Committee is already in receipt of it.

Q490 Paul Flynn: I am thinking of the Government cuts that have left Departments so emaciated that they collapse if there is an unusual demand on them. The Passport Office is an example where £1 million has been paid out in overtime alone. It made £5 million extra, where the claims for losses suffered by people who had to wait months for their passport collected in different countries are going to be enormous. The savings made by the cuts are about £2.6 million, but the actual costs of the cuts now would be £20 million or £30 million. Are there other examples like that?

Mr Hurd: To be fair, that is a debate about cuts, public finances and another Department.

Q491 Paul Flynn: But you quoted a global figure of the savings that you made. Does it take into account the resultant—

Mr Hurd: Which the Committee can look at through the published report of those savings, which we published about a month ago.

Q492 Paul Flynn: There is an endless litany of losses and chaos resulting from the activities at the agencies where you have taken public service jobs—Capita, G4S, Atos, and so on—and Steria. Steria was in my constituency, where they had a three-year operation. They lost £56 million and produced nothing of any value. Where does this come in the equation, when you claim these great—

Mr Hurd: That seems to be a question about outsourcing companies. I do not see quite how it fits with what we are discussing here, which is reform of public bodies and accountability of public bodies.

Q493 Paul Flynn: Why is it three and a half years to year zero? I thought it was four and a half years since you came into office.

Mr Hurd: You are right, in the sense that the reform process started earlier, but the Public Bodies Act did not happen in year one.

Q494 Paul Flynn: Do you think that this Committee is usefully employed in making reports, when the recent one took 22 months before there was any response from the Government? We will be deep into the territory of the next Government by then.

Mr Hurd: I have always thought, and I know the Minister for the Cabinet Office shares this view, that this Committee performs an extremely useful function. This particular review, as I have said, is extremely timely, because there is an opportunity to influence the scope of the next phase of the reform that is needed, in terms of simplifying the classification and taxonomy of public bodies. It is a classic example of where a Select Committee can add a great deal of value and challenge Government to go further. I apologise; I do not know anything about the circumstances of the delay to the reply.

Q495 Paul Flynn: Do you think all Governments have made it easier to spend on capital sums, rather than on revenue, because capital is usually a one-off expense and revenue is a continuing expense? Is that not an inevitable part of Government finance?

Mr Hurd: I am not an expert in Government finances, Mr Flynn. It is outside my scope of experience and expertise. It is a question for the Treasury.

Q496 Paul Flynn: A question on the environment: is it not inevitable that the simplest explanation for any loss is the one that is taken up by the tabloid press, which is not necessarily the right one, as people accepted the simplistic idea that it was a lack of dredging of the Somerset Levels? In fact, the real reason was the change in farming practice on the Quantocks and the Mendips, where they no longer can hold the water as they did previously. The flooding was not due to a lack of dredging. In fact, we have had flooding in this city because of dredging, because dredging has two effects: it helps the water to get out, but it makes it easy for the water to come in. Are we not likely to be there? We do not have some—

Chair: A question, Mr Flynn.

Paul Flynn: I have stayed silent for too long. Do you think we are subject to the simplistic view of the Government and their friends in the tabloid press, dictating public policy to the detriment of public experience?

Mr Hurd: That is a big general topic. You started by asking some questions about agricultural practice and the reasons for the flooding. It is so completely outside my area of expertise that I am afraid I am going to have to pass on that one.

Q497 Chair: We are going to have to draw this to a close. Thank you very much, Minister, for joining us. I must just record my dissatisfaction that you are going to have to write to us about a number of things that the Minister for the Cabinet Office himself could have told us about directly. Can I just ask how much of your time, as a percentage, do you usually spend on public bodies reform?

Mr Hurd: Obviously, I support the Minister for the Cabinet Office in it. I took the Public Bodies Act through Parliament and I have a supervision responsibility of it. What I do not get so involved in is the appointments area. I am more involved in the supervision of the triennial review process and the ongoing reform process. In terms of public appointments, I do not get involved.

Chair: What proportion of your time do you spend on public bodies reform?

Mr Hurd: It is very hard for me to measure, but it is less than I do on civil society. Put it that way.

Chair: Less than you do on civil society. We will be very clear what we need from you in writing, pursuant to this session, but I am extremely grateful that you were able to be with us. Thank you very much indeed. I hope you will look forward to our report.