



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Historic child abuse](#), HC 710

Tuesday 21 October 2014

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Written evidence from witness:

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Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair); Ian Austin, Michael Ellis, Paul Flynn, Dr Julian Huppert, Mr David Winnick.

Questions 1 – 111

Witness: **Fiona Woolf CBE**, Chair, Independent inquiry into historic child sexual abuse, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: This is part of the Committee's ongoing investigation into historical child abuse and we are delighted to welcome Fiona Woolf who is the chair of the inquiry that has been established by the Home Secretary. Could I refer everyone present to the Register of Members' Interests where the interests of members of this Committee are noted? Could I add a declaration of interest? My wife has served on the Council of the Law Society. I don't know whether that was when you were there, Mrs Woolf, or whether you ever met her, but I feel that I should declare that. If there are no other interests to declare, I will begin.

May I congratulate you most warmly on your appointment as the chair of this inquiry? Were you disappointed that you were, in effect, the second choice of the Home Secretary rather than the first?

Fiona Woolf: I am used to being in the second position. I am the second woman to be the Lord Mayor of London and also I was the second woman to be the President of the Law Society, but ignoring that for a moment, I will answer that question, if I may, in a moment. I did want to start by responding to your congratulations and to say that I recognise that this is a hugely important inquiry, not just from the point of view of the public but particularly for the victim community. I am determined that this inquiry is going to relentlessly uncover the truth for the victims.

Q2 Chair: Indeed, and of course the Committee has been calling for such an inquiry. We are delighted that on your website today, at last, we have the terms of reference and the names of your panel. We may invite you back more often because we seem to get more information every time we have witnesses coming before us, and indeed the names of your panel. But it didn't bother you that the job was offered to somebody else first?

Fiona Woolf: When I received the call, I was anxious to establish what the job was about and why the Home Office had called me because I have no background in child or family law or child protection. It was very much a focus on the way in which the inquiry will be set up and run. The terms of reference—

Q3 Chair: We will come on to that in a second. Did the Home Secretary herself ring you and speak to you?

Fiona Woolf: No, somebody else in the Home Office did.

Q4 Chair: Have you met the Home Secretary?

Fiona Woolf: I have spoken to her three times on the phone over this and I met her this morning.

Chair: This morning for the first time?

Fiona Woolf: Yes, but I had already met her previously in the Mansion House earlier this year.

Chair: In your other capacity?

Fiona Woolf: In my other capacity.

Chair: So you met her once this morning on this issue?

Fiona Woolf: Yes, but I did have three very detailed phone calls with her: one relating to the appointment and the skill sets that would be needed on the panel, the second to go through names of the panel, and the third to go through what the written ministerial statement would say.

Q5 Chair: You very openly say you have no experience and no knowledge of childcare matters. As far as I can see, you have never been to a juvenile court or taken out wardship proceedings or been involved in child care matters at all in your career.

Fiona Woolf: Not as far as my career is concerned but through my role in the Law Society and the Law Society having a deep engagement in those areas of law, I did meet practitioners. The role is very much about making sure that the inquiry remains focused and it must deliver for the victims, because we have had report after report, inquiry after inquiry, and this has to be the inquiry that actually delivers the result for them.

Q6 Chair: Of course. We understand that. That is why we are grateful you are here. Looking at your history, you have a very distinguished career. You have advised 25 Governments and multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank on attracting infrastructure and energy reforms. You have a great history of involvement in the electricity industry. You are a non-executive director of Affinity Water, an alderman, president of its ward club, and you are now a partner, again, of Cameron McKenna. None of that relates to childcare. Would you not have thought that the public would have expected that someone who chairs a major inquiry into child abuse would have just a little bit of experience in dealing with it? We know you have experts appointed to panels, but you have absolutely no knowledge and expertise in respect of this matter, have you?

Fiona Woolf: The Home Office wanted someone who could organise and run the inquiry in a way that remained focused, using a very distinguished panel of experts. They were always going to need at least one person to be an independent to operate like a non-executive director, as I have done with Affinity Water. The fact that I spent eight years on the Competition Commission, hearing inquiries on subjects that I had no experience of before, like regulatory economics in the telecoms sector, did not seem to stop the Competition Commission looking at that. My skill set comes from the fact that I have organised very large reform programmes that have to be set up on a very inclusive basis so that the design works for everybody. The sort of things that I do, if it doesn't work for everybody it is not going to work for anybody, and then you keep it focused until the end.

Q7 Chair: What you are telling this Committee is that you are really there as a manager, you are there to manage the inquiry. You would not know, for example, what section 11 of the Children's Act 2004 is because you don't need to know that. You are there to manage and keep the whole thing focused.

Fiona Woolf: I am a lawyer and I can read and I can read very long documents.

Chair: So you will be able to tell us what section 11 means.

Fiona Woolf: No, but I could get back to you with a written answer on that if you wished. There is, after all, the QC to the inquiry and the solicitor to the inquiry and all the experts. It is important that it remains focused and efficiently run and there is also the voice of the citizen on it, and I would fulfil that role.

Q8 Chair: You have not met the panel as yet. I notice that your recent trips have included South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Latvia, Vietnam and China, so you are a very busy Lord Mayor.

Fiona Woolf: That is the role. I never indicated that I could start this inquiry before I had finished this role and it has an enormous range of people that I support, look after and ask things for.

Q9 Chair: Of course. So you told the Home Secretary that you have done a lot of trips and you are going to do a lot of trips as Lord Mayor and until you finish all that you will not really have the time to get your teeth into the substance of this?

Fiona Woolf: That is exactly what I said on the first phone call.

Q10 Chair: And she accepted that there would be such as delay?

Fiona Woolf: But in the meantime we have done a great deal.

Q11 Chair: But without you because you have never met the panel, have you?

Fiona Woolf: I have spoken to each member of the panel on the phone. I did that on Saturday and I spoke to Professor Stephenson yesterday, so at least we have met on the phone. There was a lot to do. We had to develop the terms of reference, decide the skill set and find the panel. Then we all had to dig deep into a due diligence exercise and get the letters drafted.

Q12 Chair: Of course, but you would understand the concern of the public. The public is very concerned with this issue, Parliament is very concerned about this issue, that actually you have not had the time to sit down and meet the panel that is going to serve with you and provide the expertise in areas that you clearly do not possess, and you very openly said you do not possess, to enable you to fashion what this inquiry is going to do. This has not happened yet. You have not sat down with the panel and worked out your strategy. That is right, isn't it?

Fiona Woolf: We have a date in the diary to do that the week of 12 November, but in the meantime I have been reading around in the spare time that I have had.

Q13 Chair: We are grateful for that. Finally, you wrote a very long letter to the Home Secretary, which colleagues are also going to refer to. Specifically, there is a large section about your relationship with the former Home Secretary Leon Brittan and his wife Diana. Why did you feel it necessary to pay so much attention to the number of dinner parties and other meetings you have had with the Brittans? Why did you feel that that was necessary?

Fiona Woolf: I wanted to lay to rest any fears that I had a close association with Lord Brittan. Let's begin by reminding ourselves that this inquiry not about Lord Brittan but about hundreds of institutions and, frankly, thousands of systemic failures. Given that there was some speculation in the media and it was gathering traction on the social media, I wanted to give it huge scrutiny. As soon as I got back from Africa, I sat down with the Home Office and the QC to the inquiry and explored this in enormous detail. I agree with you it is a bit unusual to go to all that sort of detail, to expose the dates of dinner parties when the last one was two and a half years ago and the last one in my house was in February 2009.

Q14 Chair: You have been very transparent. You have given us dates. Apart from the menus themselves, you have told us how many people attended. But you sat down and wrote this letter to the Home Office with a Home Office official?

Fiona Woolf: Yes, I wrote it to the Home Secretary.

Q15 Chair: But did you have the support of the Home Office in writing this letter? Is that what you are telling us?

Fiona Woolf: No. The draft started in the Mansion House. It was then sent to the QC and the Home Office for comment.

Q16 Chair: With the greatest of respect, isn't that a bit odd? Why would you send a draft letter to the Home Office when you are writing to the Home Secretary to explore all your contacts with individuals who might or might not be the subject of press concern? Surely you should have written your own letter, not in draft form, and done what Lady Butler-Sloss said she did not do. She said when she resigned, "I did not sufficiently consider my background". This was six and a half weeks after you were appointed. It does seem a little odd that you should have sent the draft to the Home Office first.

Fiona Woolf: As you might imagine, I wanted to be entirely comfortable that the Home Secretary would regard my conduct as having been very open and transparent. As a result of that letter,

she has written back to me saying that she accepts that I do not have a close association with Lord Brittan.

Chair: She couldn't not do that if her own officials were helping you to draft it.

Fiona Woolf: She didn't have to do that at all.

Q17 Chair: If Home Office officials had helped you draft this letter, the Home Secretary is hardly going to write back and say, "I don't accept what you are saying".

Fiona Woolf: I think the real purpose of sending the draft around was to make sure that the lawyers to the Home Office and the lawyer to the inquiry were absolutely satisfied that I met the test in section 9 of the Inquiries Act.

Q18 Chair: Do you not think that test should have been met on 5 September when they offered you the job or you should have written to them before you said, "I am going to do the job"? If they had written back and said, "Sorry, we can't accept this, you are far too close to Lord and Lady Brittan, in his capacity as a former Home Secretary", you would have then resigned, presumably.

Fiona Woolf: Yes, and the point would not really have arisen, would it? At that point, in September, I had no appointment letter so essentially the issue was up in the air.

Q19 Chair: So even though you were announced as the head of this inquiry, you felt you were not officially appointed until after you had sent in this letter. It sounds very odd that the Home Secretary—

Fiona Woolf: I needed to settle the uncertainty created, particularly in the victim community mind, which is why I have gone the extra distance to make sure that I have dug out every possible connection with someone who is one of thousands of people that I know in the City, to make sure that it absolutely settles all the concerns that may be out there and not just with the Home Secretary.

Chair: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Q20 Mr Winnick: Did you know the Home Secretary before your appointment? Had you met with her?

Fiona Woolf: I had only met her in a City context. She had come to the Mansion House to deliver the defence and security lecture. I met her only in the context of my being the Lord Mayor or an alderman. I think I met her at a dinner in the Mansion House where she was a speaker at one point, but we are not personal friends.

Q21 Mr Winnick: You were very frank in your letter, however much was discussed, as the Chair has been asking you, about dinner parties and the rest. Do you have social relations in the same way with any member of the Government or the Cabinet—have they been invited to dinner parties and the rest?

Fiona Woolf: No, I don't think so.

Q22 Mr Winnick: Has it come as a surprise to you that the numbers involved in child abuse were so substantial as, for example, the head of the National Crime Agency said over the weekend? Did that come as a surprise to you?

Fiona Woolf: I had seen in the media that there were significant numbers and they varied, and the number of prosecutions falling very much short of that, something like 25,000 to 600. That is obviously a matter for the National Crime Agency and for Ministers.

Q23 Mr Winnick: When would you say you really became aware that there was such a problem? Was it before Rotherham when you became aware of the extent of sexual abuse of children?

Fiona Woolf: As an ordinary citizen and a grandmother, every time these reports appear in the press they hit a very raw nerve and you think, "How many of these reports do we have to receive? Are we just sitting looking at it, admiring the problem but not doing anything about it?" I am determined that this inquiry is going to be the inquiry that makes the difference, that turns the corner for the victim community, not just the existing victims but we have to think about potential victims as well, and we all worry about that.

Q24 Mr Winnick: Could I ask you about Bahrain, Mrs Woolf? I understand that you spent three years working and practising in Bahrain. Is that correct?

Fiona Woolf: That was in the 1980s, yes.

Q25 Mr Winnick: We will come in a moment to this year, but in December 2013 Amnesty reported about Bahrain and said that children were being abused and tortured in that country. Are you aware of that Amnesty report on Bahrain?

Fiona Woolf: No, I am not.

Q26 Mr Winnick: I asked that question because, apart from your having worked in Bahrain for three years, I understand that in February this year you visited Bahrain, heading a British trade delegation in your role as Lord Mayor. Is that correct?

Fiona Woolf: Yes, that is correct.

Q27 Mr Winnick: Wouldn't you have been aware of a report published last year? Leaving aside the three years you worked in Bahrain, wouldn't the delegation that you headed have been aware that a year previously there had been this report published by Amnesty, an organisation that is well known and respected—and not only in Britain of course—about the abuse and torture of children?

Fiona Woolf: I had quite a significant heavy-hitting business delegation in Bahrain. They were very focused on the growth agenda and trade and investment. Much of it was in the area of education, training and qualifications that they wanted me to promote at a postgraduate level, so

I had institutes with me, but also the banking and insurance sectors were present in the delegation. This was a very business-focused delegation.

Q28 Mr Winnick: I understand that, Mrs Woolf, but you are going to head an inquiry into a matter that is of deep public concern. Apart from the fact that you worked in Bahrain as a lawyer for three years, this year you headed a delegation in your role as Lord Mayor to a country where only a few months before Amnesty had published a report into the matters that I have already stated. Won't people say that if you were unaware of or indifferent to what was happening to children in Bahrain—unless of course one questions Amnesty's report—are you the right person to deal with the abuse of children in this country? That may be quite unfair but nevertheless it may be put to you. What would be your response?

Fiona Woolf: The role of Lord Mayor has many stakeholders and many ordinary people that it serves. The focus is not just on big banks, insurance companies, asset managers and all that, and it is a very people-focused role. The point of the Lord Mayor's overseas visits is to pack as much as you can into a short period of time, and I think I was there for a day and a half so—

Q29 Chair: Thank you. We understand the role of the Lord Mayor. Most of us have mayors in our cities, not as grand as the Lord Mayor of London but we do understand.

Fiona Woolf: It is not a grand role. It is a role that serves a lot of people.

Chair: No, we understand perfectly.

Fiona Woolf: Let me come to the point. The background briefing comes from the embassy.

Chair: We don't really need to know the minutiae. We understand the point. We get it.

Fiona Woolf: The situation in Bahrain in relation to human rights and to security is obviously something that is of concern.

Chair: Yes, but not necessarily relevant to this inquiry.

Q30 Mr Winnick: My last question to you is on a point that perhaps a number of people would make? Leaving Bahrain aside, you are a distinguished lawyer, you are Lord Mayor, the second female person to hold the post, as you say, but what would you say to people who say you come from a very limited background and that you may not be aware to any extent of the lives of ordinary people throughout the country and that someone with a wider knowledge of society should be dealing with this issue? Would you consider that unfair?

Fiona Woolf: I think the role of the Lord Mayor gives me a very wide knowledge of society. Much as I am concerned about Bahrain, the Chairman is right, it is not relevant to the inquiry. As I said before, the most important thing that the chair has to do is to chair a panel of deep expertise and it is always useful to have somebody who can challenge the group thinking, ask the awkward question.

Chair: Yes, I think you made that point before. Can I say to colleagues that we are on appointment and suitability of appointment and then we move on to the substance.

Q31 Michael Ellis: Mrs Woolf, thank you very much. I congratulate you and thank you for your public service on this appointment. You have said and accepted that you have no particular background in child abuse matters but your panel, the members of which were released today, do clearly have considerable experience, including Ben Emmerson QC, Graham Wilmer and many others. Your role is to manage the panel and to oversee the inquiry. Is that how you see it?

Fiona Woolf: I think it is to give it strategic direction, to make sure that it is managed efficiently so that it does not take for ever. The victims can't wait 10 years.

Q32 Michael Ellis: Yes, and so really it is to keep it focused, to deal with it in a strategic way and not to become side-lined?

Fiona Woolf: Also to make sure that it can see the wood for the trees.

Q33 Michael Ellis: In that regard, you say you have had eight years dealing with inquiries for the Competition Commission?

Fiona Woolf: Yes.

Q34 Michael Ellis: Can I ask you about the media speculation in connection with the former Home Secretary Lord Brittan and Lady Brittan? You said in your letter to the Home Secretary, and you have said to this Committee, that you do not consider yourself personally connected to Lord and Lady Brittan at all. Is that right?

Fiona Woolf: If by that you mean do I have a close association with them, the answer is no.

Q35 Michael Ellis: Section 9 of the Inquiries Act is the relevant part here and it says, "Do you have a direct interest in the matters to which the inquiry relates?" Do you think you have a direct interest?

Fiona Woolf: Obviously not.

Q36 Michael Ellis: It also requires you not to have a close association with an interested party. You don't accept that you have a close association with—

Fiona Woolf: I do not have a close association with an interested party.

Q37 Michael Ellis: For example, as Lord Mayor of London you would have a large Christmas card list. Would you have sent Lord and Lady Brittan a Christmas card on your personal Christmas card list, for example?

Fiona Woolf: My Christmas card list last year had about 3,000 people on it and, to be honest, I don't know whether they were on it or not.

Q38 Michael Ellis: Did you have your own personal Christmas card list in terms of family and friends that you would have communicated with?

Fiona Woolf: They were all amalgamated last year. We wouldn't separate them out but—

Q39 Michael Ellis: So you can't remember. Would they have been on your mobile phone, for example?

Fiona Woolf: No. I don't have their mobile numbers.

Q40 Michael Ellis: So there was not a close association to the extent that their names or numbers would have been on your phone or in your personal contacts.

As far as the inquiry is concerned, it is a potentially wide-scope inquiry. It is about systemic failures in our system. Is that how you see it?

Fiona Woolf: Yes. That is really the area of focus, although the terms of reference are extremely broad. They talk about the failures of state and non-state institutions, which is enormous, and then there is a list of Government departments, police, prosecuting authorities, schools, children's homes, health services, churches, political parties.

Michael Ellis: It is a very broad scope.

Chair: We will come on to the terms of reference in further questioning.

Q41 Michael Ellis: How long do you think the inquiry is likely to last? I realise it is very difficult to say at this stage. I was impressed with what you said about being determined that this inquiry is the one that makes the difference. I want to put you on the spot, if I may, and try to delve into that and ask you for some elaboration. How do you propose to go about this inquiry? What is your focus going to be? You are charged with keeping it in focus on a very broad scope. How are you going to approach that?

Fiona Woolf: We can't let this run for 10 years, as I have already said, because it is not just the victims who want answers; it is the public as well. Public concern has risen enormously. Having spoken to Ben Emmerson, the QC, he cautioned against my guessing the timetable, but I have spoken with all the panellists about this issue. We are charged with delivering an interim report at the end of March, which I hope will be at the end of the scoping and methodology exercise where we lay it all out as to what we are going to do in what order. I also think that there is scope for using a technique that the Competition Commission uses, which is to send out provisional findings and ask people to comment on them, because that way I think you probably get a better decision.

Q42 Chair: Are you telling the Committee that the interim report will come out at the end of March? Parliament is prorogued on 30 March, so the first time that Members of this House and our successor Committee will be able to look at these findings will be after 7 May. Do you think that is satisfactory?

Fiona Woolf: Yes, I think that will be fine.

Q43 Chair: Do you think it is perfectly satisfactory that Parliament can't question you on your interim report until the middle of May?

Fiona Woolf: I am sorry; I thought you were talking about the Committee commenting on that.

Q44 Chair: It is a huge issue, obviously. Parliament is prorogued, because we have fixed-term elections now. So if you publish at the end of March, there will not be a Parliament to question you on this.

Fiona Woolf: This is simply what has been put in the terms of reference or in the written ministerial statement.

Q45 Chair: But presumably without your consent as chairman, because as chairman you would want Parliament to know your findings as soon as possible.

Fiona Woolf: The Home Secretary said that she was keen that an interim report should be laid before Parliament by the end of March.

Chair: Perhaps she did not know that Parliament prorogues on the 30th. Maybe you could go back to your panel when you meet them and try to get a slightly earlier date to give this Committee a chance to question you.

Q46 Dr Huppert: Can I come back to a couple of things that you said earlier, which I found quite interesting? You talked about the role of the voice of the citizen and that you occupied that role. Do you think that the broader communities out there, the victims and other members of the general public, would see you as the voice of the citizen? I think you spoke about the victim community mind. Would the victim community mind think you were their voice?

Fiona Woolf: We have on the panel two survivors, Sharon Evans and Graham Wilmer, but we will want to be talking to the victim community at an early stage. The website has only just been finished but it will have a means of communication for the victim community. I am keen that there should be a real person for them to talk to as well. I have been talking to the panel and to Ben Emmerson about holding some early stage conferences or workshops with them to get their views.

Q47 Dr Huppert: But to go back to your comment that you are the voice of the citizen—and I think you made a similar comment to Mr Winnick that as Lord Mayor you are very in touch with things—what fraction of the general public do you think would see you, the Lord Mayor of London, as a good representative of the general citizen?

Fiona Woolf: The fact of the matter is that I am an ordinary citizen who does a huge array of different jobs for lots of different communities and parts of society.

Q48 Dr Huppert: So you think the general public would see you as an ordinary citizen?

Fiona Woolf: I think I could convince the general public that I am an ordinary citizen, if they don't see it that way. I understand that the role of the Lord Mayor is perhaps not as a well understood in some communities as it might be, put it that way, but the fact of the matter is that I do a lot of work with schools, universities, students, charities and cultural institutions across the piece. I am

going to be remembered not as the second woman to be Lord Mayor but as the woman who ran with diversity and inclusion at front and centre of her mayoralty.

Q49 Dr Huppert: I don't think anybody is doubting that there are some great achievements. I am just slightly concerned because I suspect that that the general public—and I have not polled them on this—would see you as a member of the establishment. I don't know what your income is but I suspect it is in the top per cent and a rather smaller fraction of that. Whether a randomly drawn person could in fact chair this inquiry is another question, but I am slightly concerned that if you think that you will be seen as a—

Fiona Woolf: The mayoralty is not about the establishment. The mayoralty is about providing some public services to some very ordinary people.

Chair: We don't want a discussion of the history of the lord mayorship back to Dick Whittington. Could we relate the question specifically?

Q50 Dr Huppert: My concern is how you see your role as chair of this as being perceived. I am genuinely concerned that if you believe the public will see you as an ordinary citizen in that role and the public don't, that is setting up a problem that will come back in another six months, a year, two years.

Fiona Woolf: I think the whole of the public are ordinary citizens and if anybody Googles me and looks at my CV, they will see that I have spent a lot of time being an ordinary citizen in developing countries. That is about as ordinary as it gets.

Q51 Dr Huppert: One other very quick question, just to move on. The Home Secretary said that she would turn this into a full public inquiry, with all the associated powers, if the chair of the panel were to request that. Under what circumstances would you request that?

Fiona Woolf: If we were in difficulty getting evidence and maybe if the whole thing is getting sticky and needs the importance or status of a statutory inquiry.

Q52 Dr Huppert: Can you give us an assurance that if you do have difficulty getting evidence you will make sure that that is publicly reported or informed to this Committee so that it can be checked?

Fiona Woolf: Yes, absolutely.

Q53 Chair: On timetable, in answer to Mr Ellis, you said the interim report would be coming out at the end of March and you did not want the inquiry to last 10 years. What is the time scale for the length of the inquiry, in your view, as we start these proceedings? Obviously we all don't want it to last 10 years, but what do you think is a reasonable time?

Fiona Woolf: I can't answer that. You need to give the panel and the QC time to get their arms round the scope of this, but on paper it looks vast. I think what I would bring to the party is some ideas about how to run it as efficiently and expeditiously as possible but remaining terribly thorough.

Chair: Yes, but we don't have a time limit.

Q54 Ian Austin: Whether or not it is justified, there have clearly been allegations of some sort of establishment cover-up of historical allegations. Given that, do you not think it would be better if this inquiry was not being chaired by somebody who many people would regard as a member of that establishment?

Fiona Woolf: I am not a member of the establishment and I have never been a member of any of the institutions, apart from a member of the City of London Corporation, which takes care of a very small number of children. I begin with a denial of being a member of the establishment, depending on what you mean by that. More importantly, I have a steely determination to deliver this inquiry for the victims and for the public and it would be down to me to convince anybody of that determination.

Q55 Ian Austin: I would be the last person to criticise you for the many things you have achieved in your career and the huge success that you have had, but I don't see why these inquiries always have to be chaired by somebody who would be regarded as the great and the good. Whether or not you see yourself as part of the establishment, I think many people would see you in that category. Lord Brittan was Home Secretary during this historical period and by my reckoning you had five dinner parties with him, you met his wife on several occasions for coffee privately. That is more frequently than I have seen some members of my family over a relatively short period of time.

Chair: Mr Austin, you are not the subject of this inquiry and your family relations are not either.

Ian Austin: Do you think the public's confidence in your ability to examine what was happening when Lord Brittan was Home Secretary will not be affected by what clearly I would think, and most people would think, is a close personal contact?

Fiona Woolf: As I said, this is an inquiry about hundreds of institutions and thousands of failures. My dinner parties with Lord Brittan that, as the Chairman has alluded to, are in glorious detail in the letter, now on the website, were at a time when I was a newly elected alderman and I needed to build my City network. There was never any time during the day to meet people and talk about issues to do with the EU and China and how UBS saw the world.

Chair: He was a former commissioner.

Fiona Woolf: He was a former commissioner as well. So the practice was that you arranged an evening meeting, and there were tons of these dinner parties going on all over the place. As I say, they were a long time ago now and I have held hundreds of them since. This year alone, am I repeating myself—

Chair: No member of this Select Committee has been dinner with you, that is for sure. You may have held hundreds. I think we get the point. Shall we move on?

Q56 Ian Austin: Just very finally then: when did the current Home Secretary first know of this long list of meetings and dinners and so on with Lord and Lady Brittan?

Fiona Woolf: When the issue arose, as I said, I was in Africa and the—

Chair: Sorry, let us be clear, when which issue arose?

Fiona Woolf: The Brittan.

Q57 Chair: Were you the chair of the inquiry then? Had you been appointed? Was it after 5 September?

Fiona Woolf: Yes, it was.

Q58 Chair: What you are telling this Committee is that after 5 September the issue of Lord Brittan arose and that is when you told the Home Secretary about the dinner parties?

Fiona Woolf: Yes.

Q59 Chair: You did not tell her when she phoned you on those three occasions?

Fiona Woolf: No. The issue did not arise because I did not have a close association with him.

Q60 Chair: No, but Mr Austin's point is that it was in the public domain. I think the Sunday newspapers had trailed this when Lady Butler-Sloss stepped aside.

Fiona Woolf: They had trailed it, yes. That is right.

Chair: So it was in the public domain when you were in Africa.

Fiona Woolf: As I said a moment ago, I was in South Africa and as soon as the issue arose I phoned my private secretary. He phoned the Home Office and then as soon as I got back I sat down with them, explained it in full detail, and then I decided that I was going to dig as deeply and as transparently as I possibly could so that I laid to rest any perception that—

Chair: Indeed. I think you have made that point.

Q61 Ian Austin: I would be interested to know what was added to this letter at the Home Office's suggestion and request. Do you think that would be possible, not for publication but for us to see it as part of this inquiry?

Chair: We are a bit perplexed that you should have sent a draft letter, or a letter of transparency, to the Home Office before you then wrote to the Home Secretary who is the head of the Home Office. What Mr Austin is asking for is could we see the first draft.

Fiona Woolf: As I said, it was simply done as a matter of courtesy.

Q62 Chair: We understand why it was done and you are right to have done so. We are not criticising you for that. Mr Austin wants to know if we could see the first draft that you sent off.

Ian Austin: I just want to know which bits were added.

Q63 Chair: Is there a first draft?

Fiona Woolf: I am not sure that the Home Office added anything.

Q64 Chair: Is it possible for this Committee to see that? If you can send it to us that will clarify matters.

Fiona Woolf: I have no idea because the whole thing was being done by e-mail and it was—

Chair: But it was your letter rather than anyone else's?

Fiona Woolf: Yes, it was my letter. It came from the Mansion House.

Q65 Chair: I think what Mr Austin wants is, as matter of transparency—because the issue was raised by you in the letter and you told us that a draft was sent—it would be helpful to have the first draft.

Fiona Woolf: Let me write back to you on that subject.

Chair: We don't want you to write back. We would like to see the first draft, please, and we have the power to call for papers.

Fiona Woolf: I will take the request.

Q66 Paul Flynn: Do you accept that there is a very powerful perception that the reason why the terrible abuse by Sir Cyril Smith and Sir Jimmy Savile was never exposed in their lifetimes is that there was an establishment cover-up and they were regarded as being too powerful or of too high a celebrity?

Fiona Woolf: I have read a number of reports, but I think it is for this inquiry to get in among that.

Q67 Paul Flynn: In the light of that, if you accept that—and many of us see that these people were feted in their own areas; they seemed to be untouchable in their own domains; they were guests of royalty and at 10 Downing Street year after year—the establishment itself is under suspicion because of this covering up of decades of child abuse. Isn't that what the public feel?

Fiona Woolf: I think the public feels absolute abhorrence at all these reports that continually come out, which is why this inquiry has been mobilised by the Home Secretary.

Q68 Paul Flynn: The feeling is that people are worried about the duration of the abuse that went on, publicly known by thousands of people, which never came out because the figures involved were powerful figures of influence and celebrity. Isn't that the perception?

Fiona Woolf: There are clearly reports. I read one by HMIC that said mistakes were made—I think that is the title of it—so, yes.

Q69 Paul Flynn: You are not answering my question. These are the points I want to get. It is about establishment, celebrity and that perception is there. What I want to follow up is the e-mails and tweets I get saying, “We want this inquiry divorced from the establishment in any way”, the reason that Mrs Butler-Sloss pulled out because she was thought to be an establishment figure and you are seen to be an establishment figure as well. Shouldn’t you resign in the interests of the report being accepted?

Fiona Woolf: I have already said I have never been a member of one of those bodies that are accused of having covered up. If I had been, I wouldn’t have begun to be even thought of as being—

Q70 Paul Flynn: No, but you are perceived, rightly or wrongly—and we can go into your background—as a member of the establishment. You have Cabinet Ministers’ wives to lunch.

Fiona Woolf: I don’t accept that I am a member of the establishment and I think it is down to me to keep making the point and to communicate in a way with the victim community that I can do that.

Q71 Paul Flynn: Do you believe that the perception is there and it comes to us in the form of tweets and e-mails? People are saying, “Why have we got rid of one member of the establishment and why are we having another member of the establishment judging the sins” if they are “of members of the establishment?”

Chair: Mr Flynn, I think that Mrs Woolf is clear that she does not regard herself as being part of the establishment. That is correct, isn’t it?

Paul Flynn: Does she accept that there is a public perception of it?

Q72 Chair: Do you accept that there is a public perception that you may be because of your history of corporate leadership, your presidency of the Law Society and the fact that you are Lord Mayor of London?

Fiona Woolf: The organisations that I belong to have never been in a position to cover things up.

Chair: That is very helpful.

Q73 Paul Flynn: But you have not answered the question, I am afraid. It is the public perception that matters.

Fiona Woolf: You are predicating a question about do I accept that there is a perception on a definition of the establishment, which I am struggling with because I think there is a perception of cover-up, and there may well be evidence of it, but I am asking myself by whom.

Q74 Chair: We will come on to the specifics. I think what Mr Flynn is saying is that you, of course, don’t regard yourself as being part of the establishment, but do you believe that there is a perception that you may be because of the posts that you hold and the positions that you have held so far? They may say, for example, that Mr Flynn is a member of the establishment because he is a Member of Parliament, the oldest club in the world.

Fiona Woolf: Yes, indeed, and that is mentioned in the terms of reference.

Q75 Chair: Would you accept that perception about you or not?

Fiona Woolf: I can understand that there are people who don't know what the Lord Mayor of London does, but as an ordinary solicitor in private practice I really don't think I count as the establishment.

Q76 Chair: Thank you. Let me go through the four points we would like you to write to us about on this section on your appointment. We would like to see a copy of the first draft of the letter of transparency, if there is a first draft. We appreciate that you don't remember because of other things. We are concerned that you have not met the panel so far and we would like you to write to us once you have met them, because we feel that after six and a half weeks in office you really ought to have met them by now. I know you have spoken to them.

Fiona Woolf: You would expect it to take some time to appoint the panel, after all, because you have to—

Chair: Well, of course.

Fiona Woolf: They really only have just been appointed last week. I thought I had done quite well to ring them up and have conversations with them all over the weekend. When I had asked for an extension of time before meeting this Committee, it was to do just what you have mentioned.

Q77 Chair: But, Mrs Woolf, it should not be up to the diaries of the Select Committee and yourself to decide when you meet the panel. In normal circumstances we would expect—and certainly in the 27 years I have been in this House—that when you appoint the chair of a major inquiry of this kind, the panel names are announced and the chair meets with the panel. You have said you will do this on 11 November and perhaps you can confirm when that has happened.

If you could also allay our concern about the time factor. You can't really get going on this until you finish your term of Lord Mayor, which is a very important office, we understand, and you will need to reassure us on that. Finally, you have been very open about your lack of knowledge on childcare matters but you have assured us very strongly that the people sitting on the panel have a lot of expertise and we look forward, therefore, to having that information.

I think the Committee would like you to confirm all this, if you could, in writing once you have had your first meeting with the panel.

Fiona Woolf: Yes, okay.

Q78 Mr Winnick: You said that Bahrain does not come into the issue. Without repeating myself, I would argue that, in view of the Amnesty report and the Lord Mayor's delegation, it does have relevance, if I may say so. Could I ask if Mrs Woolf would be able to write to us in due course about whether information about the Amnesty report was known to the Lord Mayor's department when the preparations were made for the delegation to go to Bahrain earlier this year?

Chair: Mr Winnick, the Lord Mayor has also visited South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Latvia, Vietnam and China. There are also human rights being raised in some of those countries. I don't want to start a war.

Fiona Woolf: I have been to 26 countries and there are probably human rights issues in all of them.

Q79 Chair: Since Mr Winnick specifically asks, when you write to us if you could give us a note on that, that would be extremely helpful.

Mr Winnick: And, of course, your background in Bahrain for the three years you worked there, Mrs Woolf.

Fiona Woolf: That is a very long time ago.

Chair: Perhaps a little note on Bahrain would be helpful. Members of the Committee do ask for things.

Q80 Dr Huppert: Just a purely practical thing, because I am sure people will talk about it. I don't want to make more of it than it is, but are you or anyone close to you connected to the Freemasons in any way?

Fiona Woolf: No.

Q81 Michael Ellis: I don't think, Mrs Woolf, that particularly edifying the issues about your background are what most people are focused on. If I may suggest, most people want a good result from this inquiry. They want you to get to work and get the right results for the victims both past and present. I don't think your social background is relevant or something that you can do anything about. I want to reinforce the importance that I attach, and I am sure everybody attaches, to your getting to work and doing a good job in dealing with the systemic failures of our system.

Fiona Woolf: Thank you.

Q82 Chair: I think we all agree. Thank you for that, Mr Ellis. Let us move on then to the substance. One of the main issues that the Committee has been concerned with has been the 114 files that were announced had gone missing in the Home Office. A dossier had been passed by Geoffrey Dickens to the former Home Secretary and nobody can locate these critical files. The Permanent Secretary, Mark Sedwill, set up an inquiry that was added to by the Home Secretary. Have you now seen a copy of the Wanless-Whittam report?

Fiona Woolf: I am told that the report is with the Home Secretary but I have not seen it.

Q83 Chair: Would you like to see a copy, bearing in mind it does concern one of the issues that is very relevant to the work that you are doing: what on earth has happened to all these missing files?

Fiona Woolf: I am told that the inquiry will be receiving a copy, yes.

Q84 Chair: Irrespective of what you were told, would you like to see a copy of this critical report into what happened to the 114 files?

Fiona Woolf: Yes.

Q85 Chair: In respect of evidence we received only a few weeks ago, and we published a report on Rotherham last weekend, there was a break-in in an office in Rotherham concerning child abuse cases and those files were missing. Would you like to also—

Fiona Woolf: Absolutely.

Chair: You would?

Fiona Woolf: Yes.

Q86 Chair: How are you going to get these files? How are you going to get to this evidence that is so critical to the success of your mission?

Fiona Woolf: I think this is the issue we referred to before, that we will be asking very awkward questions and if we can't get answers, then we will have to go to the Home Secretary and ask for more powers to compel.

Q87 Chair: Will this be an open session or will you be writing to people? Will it mostly be in written testimony or will you be opening the inquiry to public hearings?

Fiona Woolf: We will certainly be opening up to public hearings. We will be writing. We will have to be doing everything to get the inquiry delivered in the time available.

Q88 Chair: Do you feel you have the powers available to do this, to call for persons and papers?

Fiona Woolf: We will certainly start by persuasion. It is very much under the public gaze, as we all know. If we can't do it by persuasion, then we will have to look for powers to compel.

Q89 Chair: Will you be sitting in one particular building when you have these open hearings or will you be going around the country? For example, would you go to Rotherham to take evidence there?

Fiona Woolf: We certainly plan to go around the country, absolutely.

Q90 Chair: So you might go to Rotherham?

Fiona Woolf: Yes.

Q91 Chair: Where will you be based? Where will people come to you to give formal evidence?

Fiona Woolf: The Home Office is making office space available. I think not in the Home Office but somewhere else.

Q92 Chair: As yet you don't have a venue but you hope to have a venue soon?

Fiona Woolf: Yes, indeed. Unless somebody can—yes, there are nods.

Chair: Is this your assistant?

Fiona Woolf: She is leading the inquiry secretariat.

Chair: From the Home Office?

Fiona Woolf: She is on secondment but she is now independent.

Q93 Chair: You will have your own place to operate from?

Fiona Woolf: We will have our own place, yes, and we will have our own secretariat. I have put a strong marker down with the Home Secretary, twice, that it will need a strong secretariat and it will be very resource hungry.

Q94 Chair: Of course, and has she been responsive to that?

Fiona Woolf: She was very reassuring on that subject.

Q95 Dr Huppert: There are two things I would like to know about the scope, one of which is Kincora. I am sure you are aware of what has happened there.

Fiona Woolf: Yes, I am.

Dr Huppert: Do you think it should form part of this overarching inquiry?

Fiona Woolf: I gather that Theresa Villiers has put out a written statement today saying that it will be part of the Hart inquiry. I gather that the issue around the powers to compel evidence have been resolved.

Chair: Unfortunately we don't have a copy. The Home Secretary does tend to announce things in the middle of sessions. Are you telling us something new?

Fiona Woolf: Yes.

Q96 Dr Huppert: My question was not about what has happened, but do you think it should be part of this overarching inquiry?

Fiona Woolf: Part of me thinks this inquiry is enormous anyway and, in common with most inquiries, it is limited to England and Wales because normally the devolved Governments carry out their own inquiries. It is a particularly troubling and terrible case and we will certainly be watching it as it develops because there will be things that this inquiry can learn.

Q97 Dr Huppert: One of my concerns, at least, is that I am not persuaded that they will be able to get access to the necessary central Government information, the security service information that

will be necessary. I hope you will do more than just watch but be prepared to step in and say that you have to step in if that turns out to be necessary.

Fiona Woolf: My understanding was that steps have been taken to deal with that issue, but I am not in a position to comment in any detail.

Q98 Dr Huppert: Moving on from Kincora, where I realise you are in a difficult position, given the announcement that has just come out, to look at the scope. Looking at the terms of reference that have come out—the Home Office helpfully put the wrong address in the written statement but I think they are now trying to correct that, having found the right one—it does not talk about the NHS anywhere as one of the examples of institutions, and I realise it is not a complete list. We have had a particular case in Cambridge of a doctor who was abusing children, that was caught very late because CEOP failed to notify the local police of some of his actions. Can you confirm for me that abuse in NHS settings will definitely be part of your inquiry and you would, for example, look at the case of Dr Myles Bradbury in Cambridge?

Fiona Woolf: In the scope in my copy of the terms of reference it refers to health services, so I think it is wide enough. This is in the first bullet.

Chair: So you think that will be included?

Fiona Woolf: Yes, absolutely.

Q99 Dr Huppert: I am fascinated because it does not in the first bullet of the online version, but if we take it as read that it should be included, we can work out—

Fiona Woolf: Yes, let me reassure you on that point.

Dr Huppert: Thank you.

Q100 Chair: In respect of the BBC, will you also be including the allegations that were made in the BBC?

Fiona Woolf: I think that falls within state and non-state institutions somewhere.

Chair: That is pretty wide, isn't it?

Fiona Woolf: It is very wide indeed.

Dr Huppert: I have now managed to find it buried in one of the points, so I apologise for that.

Chair: Excellent. We all have the same copies now.

Fiona Woolf: I can breathe again.

Q101 Paul Flynn: Will you be looking at the political situation? There have been allegations that political discipline was maintained in this House by turning a blind eye to abuse by Members of Parliament?

Fiona Woolf: The terms of reference in the scope talk about Government Departments, Parliament and Ministers, so it sounds as though that is covered explicitly.

Paul Flynn: I am grateful to you. Thank you.

Q102 Michael Ellis: It doesn't sound like there is anything outside the scope of your inquiry, Mrs Woolf. Is that right?

Fiona Woolf: That is right.

Michael Ellis: That in itself may be a logistical problem, because having any inquiry with such a broad scope is extremely, shall we say, challenging.

Fiona Woolf: Indeed.

Q103 Michael Ellis: Can I ask you about the issue of transparency? That is one thing I know everyone will be concerned about. It is vital that the inquiry addresses public concerns over the failings that have been exposed by appalling cases of organised and persistent child sex abuse that have been uncovered, much of it by the media I might add. How will you ensure that you communicate the findings of your inquiry in a transparent manner?

Fiona Woolf: I think this inquiry is a long way from the sort of model where you have a single person carrying out an inquiry, sitting receiving evidence, and at the end of it he writes a report. It is so broad that the only way that we can run it efficiently and cover the ground thoroughly enough is to keep it very transparent. I mentioned interim reports, progress reports, public hearings, outreach meetings, road shows around the country, new types of communications.

Q104 Michael Ellis: Might you consider holding hearings outside of London to which the public and the media have access?

Fiona Woolf: Absolutely. Indeed.

Q105 Michael Ellis: Might you consider regular quarterly reports or three-monthly reports, something like that, even if they are short reports, on progress being made?

Fiona Woolf: Yes. I think regular progress reports, when we have something to report, absolutely. As I said, I am quite a fan of the technique of the Competition Commission that uses provisional findings as well and lets people comment on that.

Q106 Chair: Finally, in respect of those who sit on the panel, did you choose them or did the Home Secretary choose them?

Fiona Woolf: The way it worked was that we first consulted with Graham Wilmer, Barbara Hearn and Ben Emmerson on the different skill sets and backgrounds that we needed. As I was travelling at the time and that was a very intense period, the three of them asked around for recommendations of people who would be appropriate to fill those skill sets. Then the Home Secretary telephoned me and we talked through them.

Q107 Chair: Did you have any names of your own that you wanted to put on?

Fiona Woolf: No, I didn't.

Q108 Chair: You did not have anyone you liked. So these came from the Home Secretary, having consulted the other three?

Fiona Woolf: Yes. I think it came from the other three to the Home Secretary.

Q109 Chair: I am looking at the list here. I just wondered because one of the concerns, which has been mentioned by Mr Ellis, is the voice of the victims and the survivors. Looking at this list there are a lot of people with CBEs and OBEs, and they have done well to get them, but I can't see which particular name would be someone who would be identified as the voice of the victim.

Fiona Woolf: There are two of them. There is Graham Wilmer, who started the Lantern Project and has written books on the subject, one of which is highly recommended and will be my next book to read. The other is Sharon Evans, who is a journalist but she is also founder of the Dot Com Children's Foundation and she is a survivor.

Q110 Chair: Excellent. So you are happy with the panel? You don't want to add any names of your own?

Fiona Woolf: No, absolutely. I am delighted with the panel. It is very strong and very varied. Having spoken to them all at some length on Saturday, they are also steely in their determination.

Q111 Chair: As you are. This Committee wishes your committee of inquiry well in its endeavours and we do hope that you will send us regular reports. We are a little concerned about the time scale of the interim report because, of course, we will not have a Parliament after 30 March.

Fiona Woolf: I understand that.

Chair: Perhaps you could pencil in the end of February as a suitable date for you to come and talk to the Committee again. If there is anything you need from this Committee by way of assistance, since we have been one of those organisations that has called for the establishment of this inquiry, please feel free to write to us and let us know, as you did yesterday with so much information. We are extremely grateful. The best of luck.

Fiona Woolf: Thank you very much. Thank you for taking an interest and I do want to urge everybody to get behind it because I think then it has a chance of succeeding. Thank you very much.