



House of Commons Governance Committee

Oral evidence: [House of Commons Governance](#), HC 692

Thursday 6 November 2014

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [House of Commons Management Board](#)

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Members present: Rt Hon Jack Straw MP (Chair); Sir Oliver Heald MP; Mr David Heath MP; Jesse Norman MP; Ian Paisley MP; Jacob Rees-Mogg MP; Valerie Vaz MP and Mr Dave Watts MP.

Questions 180-238

Witnesses: **Myfanwy Barrett**, Director of Finance, **David Natzler**, Acting Clerk of the House and **Andrew Walker**, Director General of Human Resources and Change, gave evidence.

Q180 Chair: Good morning, Mr Natzler, Ms Barrett and Mr Walker. Thank you for coming. We are aiming to finish at 11.25 am. If you want to know why we are that precise, it is because Mr Heath has to go to an SI Committee at 11.30 am. I know that Mr Natzler would like to make an opening statement, so I will ask him to kick off. If either Mr Walker or Ms Barrett wants to do the same, please do so, but there is no compulsion.

David Natzler: Thank you. I have been tasked by the Commission, as part of the interim governance arrangements, with co-ordinating the work of the executive members of the Management Board, so I think I am here as the acting Clerk of the House, but also in that otherwise hard-to-define co-ordinating role, which is an interim, temporary measure. We are here representing the senior management of the House of Commons Service. Absent, as you will see, are John Borley, the director general, facilities, who is bitterly disappointed that he is too ill to attend today, and the three acting heads of three of the largest departments, DCCS, Information Services and PICT, but I hope we can try to speak for them if not about them.

Let me say at the outset that providing an excellent service to our customers, first and foremost to Members, is what we are here for. We know that we can improve. We have improved in recent years and will continue to improve in future. That will be at the heart of the strategy that we are preparing for the new Parliament.

I acknowledge that the sense among Members and others that something needed to change in the senior management of the House was a contributory factor in the events that led to the establishment of this Committee, but I think I owe it to the House Service to say that the Committee's establishment was precipitated not by any particular failure in the provision of services to Members, but by prevailing unhappiness over the appointment of a new Clerk/chief executive. In other words, it was a governance issue, and you are of course looking at governance overall and not at the details of the service that we provide. Some of the evidence that you have received, which we have obviously followed closely, conveys specific issues and grievances. With your permission, we will respond to some of them in writing rather than distract you with that now, but as we are here, we are of course happy to answer any specific issues.

I have also been struck in reading the oral evidence by the sense of disengagement that some Members feel from the business of the running of the House and the feeling that the staff are remote, anonymous or aloof. Now I know that staff from every level would relish more engagement with Members. Recent evidence of that is that we asked for volunteers for people to act as buddies to new Members coming in in 2015, and we have been flooded with applications from all around the House Service, which is really heartening—that is what staff are here for and what they really enjoy. I have of course noted the idea of staff having a name and role badge, and I am delighted to assure you that we will take that idea forward. I am personally more than happy to wear a name badge, as are all my Board colleagues. Of course, many of our staff already do so, such as a number of staff in the facilities department, as you will appreciate.

The Management Board has not sought to come to common answers or to agree common positions on all the issues that you are likely to raise with us this morning. Unsurprisingly, with different experiences, we have different perspectives. My colleagues and I will happily give their views as individuals on the way ahead. The paper we submitted gave some options, which I hope was helpful, on the Clerk/chief executive issue, which is obviously only one of the issues that you are considering, indicating some pros and cons in each case. However, there are some important areas of agreement between us—that is to say, where the Management Board is united on a subject. Above all, we value a unified House Service and would resist any solutions that reinforce the existing divisions or created a de facto division between parliamentary and other services. For that reason, we do not consider a two-pillar model of a separate but equal chief executive and Clerk, each in control of one part of the business, to be workable in practice or desirable in principle. We are united in considering that there needs to be one visible individual with ultimate responsibility and accountability for the work of the House of Commons Service as a whole, whatever the machinery beneath that person.

The second and lesser point that I wanted to stress is that the scale and significance of our engagement with the House of Lords, which I know you have raised in evidence, is growing. We are all dead keen to see it grow further, and for that, we need a person who can lead that engagement and represent the whole service in those discussions; for example, over the governance of security, where vigorous discussions are going on at present.

Forgive the length of this opening statement, but there are two further issues that I have noted from the oral and written evidence and the September debate that led to the setting up of the Committee. The first is the restoration and renewal of the Palace—R&R. No doubt

there are sound arguments for creating a chief executive role, and I am sure we will come back to that. I really do not believe that that is one of them.

Q181 Chair: That was slightly a non-sequitur. What is not one of them?

David Natzler: Sorry, one of the good reasons for creating a chief executive role is not the need to have someone who can oversee restoration and renewal of the Palace—I am sorry, that was my English, Chair.

There is simply no way that we as a Management Board or the House of Commons Commission would imagine we would be overseeing and running such an enormous programme, whatever decision is eventually taken about the phasing of the restoration and renewal. The generally accepted and published concept is the creation of some sort of separate delivery organisation, broadly on Olympic lines. That is not to deny that there is a major planning task already under way as to how to get to that authority, how to set out the independent options and so on; nor is it to deny the magnitude of the northern estate, which is a programme that we hope to finish before we move into restoration and renewal; but we would be mad to imagine that we were going to be running a massive project of that sort, which runs over many years.

The second issue that I see has arisen is security. You will appreciate that we have to be cautious, but there is undeniably a lack of clarity as to who is in charge, who is accountable, and who is operationally responsible. I think you have received in confidence copies—

Chair: We have seen that, yes.

David Natzler: So you are, I hope, confident that this is now being—not before time—addressed on a bicameral basis, and it is my personal principal priority over the next few months, and has been over the last two weeks. Obviously, I am happy to go further on that in private if you think it necessary, but there again, just to say that the idea that you need a chief executive in order to run security is not, in my view, an argument that is going to stand up, but there are many, many other arguments or discussions we can have. Apologies for the length of that statement, Chair.

Chair: Ms Barrett or Mr Walker, do you want to say anything by way of introduction?

Andrew Walker: Not at the moment, thank you.

Chair: Can I through Mr Hutton pass our good wishes to Mr Borley? We are very sorry that he cannot be with us today.

Q182 Valerie Vaz: Sorry, Chair, can I ask whether Mr Natzler's statement was on behalf of the whole Management Board?

David Natzler: Yes, including the bits where I said it wasn't—in other words, where we disagree. Absolutely everything else was, and particularly if I may say so, the point about the unified service, which we have now created.

Q183 Ian Paisley: Thank you for that opening statement, David. It was very precise in terms of the area that I want to look at, which is the effectiveness of the Management Board. If you were doing a SWOT analysis of the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, where are the real weaknesses and what has to be improved immediately, so that we have, in everyone's view, a much more effective Management Board?

David Natzler: I am going to pass that to Andrew, but just to clarify, we do this to ourselves, as I imagine any professional management board would. We use the National Audit Office to carry out an effectiveness review of the Board based on our own and others' perceptions, and produce actions for ourselves where we try to improve our performance. You will appreciate that that is based on us being completely candid with one another, and particularly how we behave in private as a management board and how we deal with things.

Before passing to Andrew, there is one thing I should say. I have been on the Management Board for less time than my colleagues—I have asked Andrew to do it because he has been on it since he was a boy—and my perception of our weakness is that we have failed to address issues over the horizon and to see things coming. I think we are very good at reacting to immediate challenges and developing policies, but I do not think that we have been adept enough at that, or sometimes at seeing the things under our own noses, which we have failed to deal with. That is a personal view, and not a Management Board view.

Andrew Walker: If I may, could I preface my remarks by saying that I have been a Management Board member for nearly 18 years, which is an awful long time? I came for three years, and I was asked to stay. There is no particular merit in that, other than that I have seen some huge changes over that period, from what I joined, which frankly was dysfunctional—it was a series of fiefdoms with people agreeing to talk a little bit once a month—to a management board that really works together and is much more professional than it was. I sent the Committee some details about the professional and experiential backgrounds of Board members, most of them having come from outside the House Service in the first place.

Because of the work that we have been doing since the Tebbit review five years ago, if I can use that as a point when some of the major changes in terms of unity of what we do were coming through, Board members have been appointed less as heads of department and more as people with wider responsibilities. Each of us, Myfanwy and I, has responsibilities that go beyond our departmental remits. There are, I think, some growing strengths there.

You asked about weaknesses and areas for improvement. When the National Audit Office came in 18 months ago and looked at us—they are going to come back again next year and look at us—they gave us some quite dispassionate advice. They said lots of things we did well and had improved on, but one of the areas in which we could do better—David has mentioned one of them—is that despite having worked with the House of Commons Commission to publish in 2010 a strategy for this Parliament, we were not always strategic and long-term enough. We were better at the short term than at the long term. We are

working on that, and we are working with our staff now on a strategy that, we hope and believe, in the new Parliament—it will need to be worked on with the House of Commons Commission and the governance bodies of the House—will give us a clearer set of strategic intents that we can follow. We will need to monitor progress on that, but we think that there is some improvement there.

Another area for improvement is that we sometimes spend a lot of time on too much detail, where we ought to delegate a bit more and sooner. There are reasons for that: sometimes, if something goes wrong, a Member, say, might be very quick to complain about it, and a natural human reaction is to take it to the highest level and try to deal with it, even though it might be a relatively small issue. The Board has been concentrating on some quite small issues. On the other hand, on some medium-sized or bigger issues we have probably come to rather quick decisions and then not always seen them through fully. I think that there is a delivery issue that we need to address.

Q184 Chair: Ms Barrett, you came in from outside. Can I ask what your experience is?

Myfanwy Barrett: My career before I came here was in local government, and I was on the management board of a London Borough. One difference is that in my previous experience, the board had a bit more time together. We met fortnightly, whereas our Board meets monthly. It would be good if we could make a bit more time because that would enable us to have more of the forward-looking discussions and planning discussions rather than just trying to focus more on the business of the day. We all get on very well, we are very polite, but sometimes we do not sufficiently air an issue where we do have a difference of opinion and don't surface enough any points of difference. That then means that, as Andrew said, when we come to implement the decision, cracks can appear when we try to get it all running on the ground. I think having a bit more time together and being more open and honest in our discussions would be helpful.

Ian Paisley: To follow on from that, in your view is there an absence of the firm hand of leadership in terms of saying, "This has got to be done. You are responsible. The buck stops with you. Get on with it"? It has been relayed to us that there is an opinion that there are some really brilliant people in this Management Board but they just don't have the opportunity to breathe and to get on with doing what they are really good at doing. Is that the case? Is there too much opaqueness in there and not enough firm smack of leadership?

Myfanwy Barrett: I don't think it is so much a lack of leadership. When we are in the Board we have a discussion; we make a decision—we have got much better at being explicit about what that decision is and recording it. Then when we go off to implement it, sometimes, further down in the structure, we have problems in persuading people that this is what we agreed to do and this is what we are doing. So I think it is more about a culture in the organisation that follows up on a decision and accepts that that is a decision and it is going to happen.

Q185 Jacob Rees-Mogg: The Management Board has some external members. Do you feel that they give you the right sort of advice and challenges?

David Natzler: Yes. I know you interviewed them, or took evidence from them, I should say. Yes, I am sure they could do even better, but they have challenged us, most recently during our long and protracted discussions or negotiations on pay and reward, but also before that. So in the three years that I have been on the Management Board, I have found their presence really useful. They know us not only as people but they know the organisation and they bring a fresh and vigorous perspective. So the simple answer is yes.

Andrew Walker: They do bring some experience that we don't have. So although we have quite a wide experience, they bring more. Dame Janet Gaymer, for example, has a CV that is incredible—she brings so much experience to it—but then the key thing is that she will challenge us using that. Within the Board she can do that, and in a way it is safe to own up to a weakness and be challenged and do something about it rather than do it in public.

Q186 Jacob Rees-Mogg: How does the Management Board deal with disagreements, both internally if you have disagreements with your outside advisers or with each other, and then with other bodies that get involved in running the House of Commons such as the Commission?

David Natzler: Internally, we deal with it as any professional body of senior managers would. We reach a consensus if we can. If we cannot—at the moment, there is no secret that there are interim arrangements where one of the non-executives, Dame Janet, is in the chair. But in the three years that I have served when Robert was the Clerk and chief executive, we recognised absolutely his authority to decide what the decision was, if I can put it that way, the same as a Chair of a Select Committee, and with the same willingness to listen and then say, “Well, this is the decision.” In some cases, if we couldn't agree, I recall on several occasions saying, “We'll leave it up to you. You must decide. You have heard what we think and we think there is a way that you can see through it.”

Disagreeing with the Commission is not something that a Management Board can very easily do. If the Commission were to give us a direction or an instruction with which we disagreed, I think at the moment it would be for me, because I represent the Management Board on the Commission, to make it clear that we disagreed and we would have to come to some solution. But at the end of the day the Commission has substantial powers of authority in terms of money and people, which are the two big things.

Q187 Jacob Rees-Mogg: I think, Ms Barrett, you have answered this to some extent, but there was the statement in the annual governance statement that the Management Board needed to have more open and frank discussions in meetings. You touched on that in an earlier answer. I get the impression you feel that that is now happening, but that, to some extent before, people were all frightfully polite. Something might be agreed, and if they did not like it they then went away and did not do it. Is that now changing, or have I been reading too much into what you have said?

Myfanwy Barrett: I think you are right that it is getting much better. We recently had lots of discussion about the staff pay award and the pay deal, and that is a good example of where we had a very full discussion. We had a really robust exchange of views. The non-

execs made a big contribution. We reached an agreement, and we all signed up to the agreement that we reached.

Occasionally, perhaps still, as Andrew suggested, we will reach a decision where we have not had enough airing of views, and that is when we sometimes have problems implementing later on, but I think overall we are much better now.

Q188 Jacob Rees-Mogg: And one of the things that you think would help would be meeting fortnightly rather than monthly?

Myfanwy Barrett: Personally, I do feel that if we had more time together as a board, that would be helpful and we would get more value from our non-execs as well.

Q189 Jacob Rees-Mogg: Just continuing on the annual governance statement, it lists a number of areas where the organisation does not claim to be as effective as it should be, some of which are of great importance: financial management, procurement, security and health and safety. What are the root causes of this in governance terms?

Andrew Walker: Can I cover health and safety and illustrate an issue with that, which is being addressed and which perhaps illustrates the point? Health and safety is one of those things that has to be done jointly with the House of Lords. We have a culture of trust, whereas health and safety is based basically on risk assessment and people taking responsibility for ensuring a healthy and safe work environment. Our main risks are in the construction area, as you might guess, rather than in offices where most of the health and safety risks are pretty minor. We do not have accidents. It is very low level.

So the main issues are trying to find an arrangement whereby, with multiple governance, there is strong safety advice and policy, and then there is follow through with managers. We had an audit in 2010, which Deloitte did. It was quite a good one and we reorganised. It did not work all that well, and they have come in again and audited us this year. They have drawn a line under our current arrangements. They have said, “If you now do those, those will work,” but one of the key things is getting the two Houses to work to the same policies.

Q190 Chair: I want to move on to the central issue of the relationship between the Clerk and the chief executive and whether the job should be split, and if so, what the relationship is between the two jobs. Paragraph 9 of the evidence that the Management Board as a whole put in states: “The Management Board does not have an agreed position about the desirability of splitting the Clerk/Chief Executive job, or about the hierarchy and line management arrangements between the two posts if they were to be split.” Currently, that is also the position of this Committee, but we have to find an answer.

I shall invite colleagues to come in on this. Mr Natzler, as you will be aware, there has been some evidence—by no means universal—suggesting that having a job of Clerk and chief executive is combining two sets of functions that no one individual will have all the skills to do. Leaving aside who should be superior to the other—for the moment, that is a

separate issue and there is quite a lot of evidence on that—would it not make sense to separate the Clerk’s role from the chief executive/chief operating officer role?

David Natzler: Obviously, we all have views on this and obviously we are all—I am putting this as delicately as I can—interested parties.

Q191 Chair: We understand that. I am not asking you to look backwards or to offer your—

David Natzler: I am not looking backwards. I am where I am, which is a hybrid position, and looking forward. So if you appreciate that, I will answer as candidly as I can.

I think it is very difficult to expect any one individual to function according to the lines laid out in the May 2014 advertisement. My understanding is that that is also what the advisory panel decided—that it was very difficult to imagine that anyone could do the job as there described.

On that basis, do I think the job should be split? I think that is the wrong way of looking at it. I think you have to get away from titles and talk about functions. Is it conceivable that a single individual can combine enough of the qualities, if there are two distinct functions, to be worth their salt? The answer to that question is yes, I do think that is possible. It may be that we are unique in the United Kingdom Parliament that we can’t find anyone to do it, because around the world people manage to do it. However, among my colleagues as secretaries general around the world, no one pretends they find it easy or that they are equally gifted or experienced in all parts of the job. If I may suggest, it is presumably not always easy to be both a Minister and a Member of Parliament, but some of you managed to do it. Perhaps combining those two roles does cause stress and strain and perhaps you do one better than another, I don’t know. Is it possible to do? Yes. Is it difficult to do? Yes.

Personally, I favour the idea of what has been called a chief operating officer, whatever title you like, or managing director. If I were to be the Clerk of the House, I would welcome a senior individual covering—I do stress this—the whole organisation, not just the facilities side of it, the non-parliamentary side of it, because I don’t want to divide the organisation, but who would add an enormous amount in terms of pursuing performance, looking into areas where we might have weaknesses across the organisation as a whole, and enforcing the views or decisions of the Management Board as part of the Management Board.

The chief operating officer is the model used by the National Audit Office. The COO works alongside the Comptroller and Auditor General within the National Audit Office, and obviously quite a lot of other organisations that I respect. It is not, I think, one used in Government, by and large, where you have a permanent secretary who seems to try to cover off all the corners. I believe it is one used under different phrases in—and no offence to this House of Commons, which I love—the national museums, some of whose directors I hugely admire and who have staff of approximately equal numbers and complexity, which is to say they have a million visitors, as we do, and thousands of staff. There again, you often have someone in charge who would not perhaps be running a FTSE 100 company, but is able to be the visible head of the institution to the staff, the public and others without pretending to be a perfect source of advice on every matter.

Q192 Chair: Is that code for saying that just as the director of the British Museum needs to be someone who understands the subject matter of the museum, a key qualification for the senior post here has to be someone who understands the subject matter.

David Natzler: It isn't meant to be coded; I'm sorry. Yes is the answer to your question. I am a huge admirer of Neil MacGregor and what he has done at the British Museum. If I may take his name in vain, he is not an expert in many of the things in the museum—his background is at *The Burlington Magazine*—but he is respected by the professional staff there, who have lots of individual expertise, and he has a vision for what to do with that great institution. So yes, it is not meant to be coded.

A more simple way of putting it, which I think is what Lord Browne told you, is that if you want to run a business, it is best run at the top by someone who knows the business, which I understand to be Mr Buffett's investment strategy. That does not mean that it has to be someone who is the world's biggest expert on the constitution, which I am not. There are professors who know more. It does not mean that it has to be someone who wants to edit "Erskine May", which I do not particularly want to do. It does mean someone who knows the business, which could be someone not from the old-fashioned Clerks hierarchy—I can easily see that—but I think it makes it much more likely that they will be able to deal with the astonishing multiplicity of things that go on here and awkward decisions on apparently small issues if they know that the core business of this place is not the hotel services, running the building or even cleaning offices. The core business is that we are a Parliament. To my mind—I am probably naive—it is quite simple.

In my few weeks here, I have signed off business cases as the accounting officer, which is a responsibility that I take seriously. I do ask myself whether I am adding any value if I sign off a business case on fire compartmentation or on audio/video or on a new telephony system, which I have not done yet. I am also not an expert on stonework. But I have found that every time I have read it, I am able to add something and ask some questions because of my knowledge of the working of Parliament, but not those detailed—

Q193 Chair: I will put one quick question to you and then will ask your colleagues to come in. To give a specific example, the old Lord Chancellor's Department tended to have as permanent secretary people who had come up the ranks in the Department and were lawyers who knew the judiciary inside out. When it transmogrified into the Ministry of Justice, I was instrumental in appointing a new permanent secretary, Suma Chakrabarti, who had no experience whatsoever of the core business of the Ministry of Justice, but none the less, by common consent, did an extremely good job because he understood the business and what it did and was able to challenge parts of it, including the Prison Service, which is famously extremely introspective, and the judiciary, which is not much less introspective. Are you ruling out a Suma Chakrabarti figure from taking the senior job?

David Natzler: I have to throw that back to you. That is up to you. If you are offering me Suma as a chief executive officer, to whom the Clerk, whoever that is, would report, I am sure that we could work together. As I have said, the Board position is that we do not want

two separate pillars, but I can well conceive of someone with that sort of background being able to function to some degree as a chief executive officer of the House of Commons.

Chair: All right. Ms Barrett?

Myfanwy Barrett: As David says, the two things that we are most concerned to achieve are unity in the House Service and clarity about who is in charge. I can see that we need someone who is clearly the head of service and who is a figurehead. I can see that that person being the recognised expert on procedure and constitutional matters and being somebody who is recognised here and also in other Parliaments would work well. I can see that having a chief operating officer or managing director-type role underneath them might be a good next step.

I know that the National Audit Office has quite a similar model, where the Comptroller and Auditor General is in charge and is responsible for audit opinions, and so on, and is the figurehead of the organisation, but they have a chief operating officer, and as far as I can see that may be a good way to go. I think, then, that the COO could really focus on delivery and performance and efficiency, so, going back to the discussion about the effectiveness of the Board, could really be the person who has to make the Board decisions happen; and I do think—I probably would say this, being a finance director—there would then be an opportunity to perhaps look at the other Board roles, such that you did not end up adding extra cost into the senior structure over a period of time.

Q194 Chair: Would you rule out having, as it were, the equivalent of a permanent secretary coming as chief executive, who knew about government in its wider sense and running a large organisation—so who did not necessarily have great expertise in the day-to-day running of, say, prisons and judiciary, but was a fast learner? Would you rule that out?

Myfanwy Barrett: I don't think we are ready to make a step that big, personally. The other thing I have learned a lot since I came here as well is that somebody who, like David, sits in the Chamber and has all that interaction with Members has a huge advantage of knowing who all the Members are, knowing what their interests are, knowing which constituency they are from. Those of us that work more in what you might call back-office functions have strong relationships with small groups of Members—in my case the Finance and Services Committee—but do not have that much broader interaction. To me, whoever is in charge needs to have that relationship with Members.

Andrew Walker: I have a slightly different perspective.

Q195 Chair: Good; we assumed you would not have written this paragraph unless there were different perspectives, and we are rather anxious to hear them, please.

Andrew Walker: Indeed. There is remarkable agreement among us as to pros and cons of the options, and you have got—we agreed this note that we sent to you and we do all agree with it.

Q196 Chair: But the note offers different views, so tell us what your view is, please.

Andrew Walker: My view is there is a case, taking the Suma Chakrabarti example that you gave as a kind of example, for looking for a head of service/chief executive—whatever you call it—who is not just a figurehead but might very well bring some broader experience, might offer some constructive challenge into the organisation and lead it with vision, depending on what was wanted. I think that is a choice, and certainly over the years, I have made the same point to various reviewers— Braithwaite and Tebbit and so on—so I have been of that view for some time. However, I do think either model could be made to work. We all agreed that the sort of two-pillar model of equals is likely to be quite disastrous.

On the advantages of, say, someone either coming in or, I should emphasise, in due course coming through the ranks, I am with David on this. I do think we ought to be able to home-grow people who may compete and may get such a job, so I don't assume what we are talking about is a captain of industry here, or indeed that we need a huge commercial expert, because we are not a commercial organisation; but leadership, a different perspective, perhaps something else in public life might bring us—as it were take us out of ourselves a little bit and help us, challenge us as it were, to move on to a higher plane. So I would certainly like the Committee to think that one through. I think in the end we all believe that, if there is a clear lead from the House about one model or another, we are up for it. We will make it work, whichever it is.

Chair: We will stay on this subject. I will just ask Mr Watts to come in, and would other colleagues like to signify?

Q197 Mr Watts: Thank you, Jack. Can I just try and flush out that? I think you say that two pillars would be confusing, but I think Members take the view that they are reasonably happy, if not very happy, with the Clerk side of the operation; but the management side of it they are very unhappy about. They take the view that they would like to have confidence that whoever was running each one of those had the relevant skills to do the job. The argument would be that the Clerks would do what they do, which is provide good-quality advice and support to Members in the Chamber and in Committee, and the chief executive would deliver the mechanics of the operation. If you end up with a Clerk in overall charge, for example, then the Clerk would in some respects not have that skill base to carry out that function effectively. If you did it the other way, you would have a chief executive who was capable of running the organisation but was unqualified as a Clerk and that would cause problems. Can you give us a better explanation of why you feel that two identical posts would not work?

Chair: Mr Walker first. This is a crucial issue, obviously.

Andrew Walker: My main reasons are that I think it would be incredibly divisive and we have seen some real benefits and some improvements in services from the unification of the House Service. In effect, we had a seven-pillar model. We had almost independent departments who didn't work together very well. The services varied. Some were very good and some weren't so good. We see in some other Parliaments an equal split between, if you like, management and procedure and constitutional services. It is split slightly different ways. In New Zealand, for example, frankly it is disastrous. You go over there and you see—

Q198 Mr Watts: Mr Walker, I am not suggesting we have six again. You haven't given me an explanation. You need to flush out some of this. This is generalisation rather than fact.

Andrew Walker: Okay. In the case of a Parliament with two—a head of administration and a chief Clerk—as you have in New Zealand, which I visited not so long ago, it is quite an unhappy place. There is rivalry between them and that isn't good for the services provided to Members. The staff don't know who is leading them. They don't feel part of a single enterprise, which is about serving the Members there and the public beyond them. I think you can have the benefits without, in effect, running two parallel organisations. That is my proposition.

David Natzler: I don't really accept your premise. I am sorry if that sounds like a Minister in the Chamber. I don't think there are two little things going on here in my world called Clerks and administration. I think that is misconceived. Clerking is hardly a term that we use. We have lots of services that we provide. In this room, you have people from various bits of the organisation who are all contributing to your secretariat in different ways. I am not sure if they are clerking. I know there is someone from *Hansard* here. Is that clerking or is that administration? I know there is someone who is helping with the audio-visual record. Is that administration or is that clerking? We need the lights on. We need the room allocation. The room allocation is a complicated system in which lots of people are involved, including accommodation services in the Department of Facilities.

So the thing is designed to be seamless and it is like trying to break off in an opera house the singers and players from the rest of the theatre. It is one big performance that we try to put on with you as the performers. So breaking it up into two separate sections is, in our view, going to be—this is a professional view—a bad idea. That is why we have said that is not in our mind conceivable. Now, it is difficult, particularly in public, to go into the details about what I fear what might happen, but I see the danger of rivalry, or the sort of culture, when I came here almost 40 years ago, of bits of the service thinking less of other bits of the service. There is still obviously rivalry. Everybody thinks their IT could be better or that their furniture could be better or that something could be done better. But the point is that we are now under single management, pulling together and putting on this enterprise that is Parliament. Dividing that, I believe, is a bad idea.

Myfanwy Barrett: Two things: one, you have to know who is in charge, so you can make decisions and be clear about what those decisions were. I think it would be difficult to have two people at the top at the same level. What happens if there is a disagreement and so on? But, more importantly, there is a big cultural issue here in the organisation. When I came here, you rapidly got the feeling that there was a certain culture around the Clerks in the organisation and then there was everybody else. We have worked really hard to try and break down some of those barriers to make sure that the staff feel integrated in one team and one organisation. My biggest worry is that if we went for a split side-by-side role, we would reinforce that cultural difference in the organisation and undo all the efforts we have made to try and remove it.

Q199 Sir Oliver Heald: The building of the House Service has been a major improvement in what has gone on here, and it has made progress since I was on the Commission some years ago. What worries me a bit is that if you have a House Service where people have not had a good spell in the Clerks Department or perhaps have not been out into industry, there is not that mix of skills there in the person who is taking the top job—if it is not a Clerk or somebody with business experience—and so you end up with a lopsided type of head in a way.

Some of the jobs that the Clerk does, such as going to see the Lord Chief Justice to discuss the boundaries of privilege or super-injunctions, require a heavy hitter, somebody who has got a position of authority and knows quite a lot about the things that the Clerks know about. How do you imagine we can square that circle? Are the Clerks prepared to go on secondments in industry, and are the other members of the team prepared to go and do a spell in the Clerks Department? How are we going to get these rounded individuals?

David Natzler: Again, this is difficult on a personal basis.

Q200 Sir Oliver Heald: We are looking to the future.

David Natzler: I am looking to the future—10 years' time. Most of our A2 and SCS staff, particularly those in Chamber and Committee Services and also in Information Services, are actively encouraged to do secondments. We can give you the figures as to how many have, but most have. I often wonder what has happened to some valued colleague, and I am told they are out somewhere else. It is not always in industry; it may be in other bits of the public service. We have had colleagues in the Bank of England, which is, if you like, semi-public service. Currently, we have people in the Department for Education and the Foreign Office. We have the Leader's adviser, who goes into a very different world as the adviser to the Leader of the House. So that is very much the model that we believe in. We want people to get wider experience, while at the same time not diminishing their core professional expertise and knowledge, which we have to keep on producing to have any sort of succession policy.

On the second point about people within the House of Commons who have come from other professions or other areas of life, I am sorry John Borley is not here; he came from the Navy. Andrew came from the Inland Revenue, and Myfanwy came from a London borough. They have obviously had that experience outside. How to ensure that they are knowledgeable about the core business of the House is difficult, but not impossible. Some of them, for example, in a minor way, volunteer and serve as Associate Serjeants. You may have seen that in the Chamber. Those are people from various Departments. They are not experts on the calling forward of amendments on Report, but they gain not just a ringside seat, but a knowledge about how the House works. The buddy system, which I mentioned, is already proven. People come forward and then have to be told what they are going to tell to new Members. So we are aware of that business of integration, but it is unreal to imagine that we will produce lots and lots of people who are, as it were, potential candidates in 10 or 20 years time to be the Clerk of the House, under whatever structure or title you call it. We certainly intend to produce enough and to ensure that all our management-level staff have knowledge and direct experience of the House. Indeed, those who have been here, like

Andrew, for some time are, as he says, pretty knowledgeable about exclusive cognisance. You cannot serve in HR and so on and not be pretty conscious of that.

Q201 Jesse Norman: Mr Natzler and Ms Barrett, we are not going to look at the current recruitment issues in this session, but I just wanted to say that if—I have discussed this with the Committee—you wish to write to the Committee in confidence separately with your views on that, you would be welcome to do so.

Myfanwy Barrett: Thank you.

Q202 Jesse Norman: I want to ask you briefly about the Office of the Chief Executive and how effective it is in supporting both the chief executive and the Management Board. We have touched in some respects on how it can be made more effective, but perhaps touch on that and then also specifically address Ms Barrett’s point about delivery. I don’t know whether anyone would like to kick off.

David Natzler: As you know, we do not have a chief executive at the moment, but the Office of the Chief Executive is in practice reporting to me and to a slightly lesser degree to the non-executive chair of the Management Board pro tem. I am sure that my colleagues will have views and the secretary to the Management Board and head of the OCE is sitting behind me, so I am sure that if you wanted to hear directly, we would be very happy.

I think the Office of the Chief Executive does a good job for the Management Board. I find it very effective in terms of what you would expect from a secretariat of a management board and in its ability to pass on the Management Board’s decisions around the organisation. What it is not and what it, as currently structured, cannot altogether be is what the envisaged chief operating officer might be, partly because of where it sits in the hierarchy. It is not a Lord Lever-type enforcing role—other Cabinets perhaps had enforcers, but I don’t know. It is extremely good at bringing together departments, as has occasionally happened even in my short time as the non-chief executive, when something has to be got together from various senior officers by way of a response to a policy issue or, indeed, to an incident. Valerie will know a recent example. If we want to bring together a response to something, that is what it is very good at doing. It is good at chasing down what is not being done. It is not there to enforce, as it were.

Q203 Jesse Norman: That is interesting. You make them sound like a kind of convener or bringer-together of people, rather than actually something that says, “X was delegated to do this. Why hasn’t X done that?”

David Natzler: I didn’t mean at all that it was a convener. I meant that it is something less than an enforcer, but it is certainly a polite inquirer on the behalf of the chief executive, which I am not, that says, “I thought this had been agreed. Can you tell me, so I can tell the chief executive, why it hasn’t happened?” or “What has happened to X?” That it does do, and it is a big part of its task.

Q204 Jesse Norman: I don't understand. Surely, when Sir Robert Rogers was running it, it did not lack authority. Sir Robert Rogers was the chief executive as well as the Clerk of the House. Surely, it could easily have invoked his authority to insist that whatever it was that had been decided should be implemented.

David Natzler: Yes.

Q205 Jesse Norman: Why did that not happen?

David Natzler: I think it did sometimes happen. It sometimes happens now, but there are directors general who may not feel that something is an accurate representation of what the Board agreed or who may not accept the authority of the chief executive—*[Interruption.]* I am being candid.

Q206 Jesse Norman: “Who may not accept the authority”. That is candid and it is very helpful. Could you, Mr Natzler or Mr Walker or Ms Barrett, write to us in confidence with an example or two of this? I am not sure that it is necessarily appropriate to discuss it now, unless you have something that could be discussed publicly. I would like to see an example of when the authority of the chief executive was not respected by someone or when a problem emerged because of a lack of clarity. I would like to know how this actually worked its way out in a particular case.

David Natzler: Well, we can look around to see if we can find something, but obviously—

Chair: It would be in confidence, of course. We have had plenty of confidential evidence.

Q207 Jesse Norman: Just one more point before I hand over to Valerie. How well does the Management Board work with the Commission?

David Natzler: We said in our paper that we would like to see more collegiality. That is not to say that we don't think we work well with the Commission. On some recent issues it has been an extremely good relationship: they have not sought to second guess or undermine us; they have given us direction, or direction of travel. They have supported us in difficult times, as part of their function is to give top political cover to difficult decisions that have to be made, but I think we felt in general—and I'm going to turn to Myfanwy because she has experience of this from local authority level—that the member-officer interface is not as easy as it conceivably could be.

Q208 Jesse Norman: Is that in part because they cut and run? They give you encouragement and then they don't give you the cover that you need to do the job and run it through?

David Natzler: No, I don't detect that.

Myfanwy Barrett: I do not think that is the issue, because when we go to the Commission for a decision and we get a decision, that is pretty clear. If I compare it with a cabinet system in local government, which I have worked in, our governance structure is not dissimilar in many ways, because the cabinet is a body that is entirely composed of political members and the management board is the executive body. The cabinet meets once a month and makes decisions and then the management board will go away and implement them, so there are some quite good parallels.

The thing that is different and I think is missing here is the opportunity for the Commission and the Management Board to meet all together reasonably regularly for general discussion about forthcoming business and the strategic direction. In the local authority set-up we had a monthly cabinet briefing with the whole board and the whole of the cabinet, running up to the formal public meeting where we could discuss together the things that were on that agenda or in the pipeline. The way we work here, when something is discussed in the Commission, David will be there as the Clerk and then when it is “your item”, you go in for “your item” and come out again. So when we discuss the budget I will go in, we will discuss the budget and then I will come back out. That means we do not have a collective time when the whole Board and the whole Commission can discuss things.

Q209 Valerie Vaz: Can I just clarify something? In your opening remarks, Mr Natzler, you said something about resisting any divisions. What did you mean? If the Committee came up with a conclusion—

David Natzler: Obviously what the House decides we will implement—

Q210 Valerie Vaz: It is just that you used the phrase “resist any divisions”.

David Natzler: I understood you were in discursive mode and so I was saying what we would be against.

Q211 Valerie Vaz: So whatever we come up with, you are not going to resist. I just wanted to clarify that.

David Natzler: Whatever the House agrees, obviously we will carry out.

Chair: You were using “resist” in an intellectual way.

David Natzler: Yes, I am sorry, like resisting an amendment.

Valerie Vaz: Sorry, it is my lawyer line. When you say a word I believe it.

David Natzler: No, I am sorry, it is like resisting an amendment in a Public Bill Committee. It does not mean if it is passed you do not put it in the Bill.

Q212 Valerie Vaz: Right, okay. I just wanted to clarify your remarks and to make it clear that you were not going to resist anything that came up, because you specifically said that. Anyway, let's move on.

We are focusing on this relationship between the Board and the Commission. There has clearly been an issue, a problem, that has arisen and we have been tasked by the House to look at the governance structure. Did any of you on the Management Board speak to the Commission about this lack of clarity? That is what seems to be coming out in the evidence. Have any of you raised this before or do you feel that you get a clear direction from the Commission? Or maybe you don't believe that the Commission gives you a clear direction.

Andrew Walker: Can I just illustrate this for you? On specific issues, by and large we get very clear outcomes. We talked about the big discussions that we had on the Management Board about pay, but the Commission is the employer, so the Commission also discussed pay and got involved on several occasions, because we had a major pay dispute, a long-term pay negotiation and a court case, so it was very complex. We had clear decision taking and leadership on that. I have no complaints at all. However, there was a time when we had some joint meetings with them, which did not work very well. So when it came to clarity of where we were going on the broad spectrum of the provision of services, that was a lot less clear to us. We feel that if we talked more to the Commission in a joined-up way, we would then, when we are asked to implement things, have a clearer idea of where we are trying to go.

Q213 Valerie Vaz: So we are now looking forward. Do you consider that it is the Commission that should be giving you your instructions? I am not clear now. You look quizzical, Mr Natzler, as though I am not speaking English, but I assure you I am. I get the feeling from the three of you sitting there that you are operating at a sub-level. The Commission is up there and the Management Board is down there. You do what you want to do, and then you put it to the Commission and they ratify or not. Help us. I am just trying to work out how this is all out in the open and how this is for everyone to understand how this whole place operates.

David Natzler: The Commission is in charge.

Q214 Chair: Are the agendas and timing of the Commission and the Board tied in together as they would be where you have a management committee and a board of directors?

David Natzler: So far as possible, yes. Meetings change and so on, but there is a cycle. Absolutely.

Q215 Chair: The Commission sees the Board's minutes and the Board sees the Commission's minutes?

David Natzler: The Board minutes are published. Everyone can see the Board minutes. I assume the Commission's secretariat make them available if they think they need to, and we see the Commission's.

You ask whether we are up there and down there. That is not the picture that I have in my head.

Q216 Valerie Vaz: It is the picture I have in mine.

David Natzler: You asked if there is a problem, have we raised it? No, I have never discussed this, but then I have only just arrived. The issue is that we sometimes seem to want to take solutions to the Commission and ask them to ratify our solutions, whereas perhaps in a more collegiate style we would be discussing together not as equals, because members and officers, as in a local authority, are different, but to say, “Here is a problem we’ve got. This is something going on in the House.” Again, take security governance. “Can we talk about it with you all before we feel we have to come to you with an intellectually ordered and publishable paper with a proposed solution, which we hope you will agree?” So it is a style of working that could be more what we mean by collegiate. You asked whether any of us have put this. I do not know. This is an opportunity to be asked. I am fairly sure the Commission would be welcoming—I know there are ex-Commissioners here—if they realise that that might be in some senses a different way of working on the larger issues that we face.

I am looking quizzical because I am trying to think how—

Q217 Valerie Vaz: In terms of accountability, who do you believe has the final accountability?

David Natzler: For?

Valerie Vaz: For the running of this House and for governance.

David Natzler: The Commission, who are Members.

Q218 Sir Oliver Heald: On this collegiate relationship between the Management Board and the Commission, would it mean that the Members were adequately holding the executive to account?

Myfanwy Barrett: You can have both. You can have discussions that are less formal between the two groups to try and agree the best way forward on major issues, or discuss forthcoming business, but then you get to the formal stage of the process where it is very clear that the management team are making some proposals or suggestions, but the Commission is making a decision and is exercising its political authority. I do not think the two are mutually exclusive.

David Natzler: Because, as we were saying, the Commission is the ultimate authority and it is accountable, I assume, to the House of Commons and ultimately to the public, for what happens. Absolutely. That does not mean we could not—. We could have had a private discussion and then a formal evidence session. That is what Select Committees sometimes do: without diminishing their ability to question witnesses formally, they could have an

informal session where you get a feel of what it is that people really want to find out. I am sorry if I looked quizzical but I am concentrating.

Q219 Sir Oliver Heald: Do you think it would work better if the Commission were not the way it is at the moment, and perhaps had some non-politicians on it as non-execs. One problem, as you will know, is that politicians have little time and they do their best on the Commission, but then some decision can suddenly very controversial with all the colleagues and it goes hot—you will remember the security screen; the debate where Peter Hain and I had a very difficult time. Do you think part of the problem is that because the Commission is all politicians, it is too inward-looking and would benefit from giving it that bit of outside input?

Andrew Walker: I think the Commission might benefit from some non-execs. There are different ways of doing that. An example of where non-execs and politicians working together does work quite well and holds us to account, is the audit committee.

Q220 Chair: Yes, we have had evidence on those.

Andrew Walker: You have Commissioners and non-execs who are quite challenging and inform the debate so that the politicians can take up some of the issues.

Q221 Chair: That is your view, too, is it, Ms Barrett?

Myfanwy Barrett: I agree about the audit committee.

David Natzler: I agree.

Chair: I want to go out of order among colleagues, and Mr Watts has been accommodating about this. I want Mr Heath to come on to the relationship with the House of Lords.

Q222 Mr Heath: I have one short question first to Myfanwy Barrett. You were talking about the similarity with the local government model and what I consider a new-fangled local government model with a cabinet. The one difference there is that you have got portfolio holders with specific responsibilities. Would it be helpful if Commission members had particular portfolio responsibilities, so that you had a sounding board?

Myfanwy Barrett: In effect, I have got a portfolio holder, because John Thurso is the Chair of the Finance Committee, he is on the audit committee and he is a pension trustee. He engages with everything that my Department does and I find that extremely helpful. It helps to take a wide agenda forward if you have got that support across your Department, so that has helped me.

Q223 Mr Heath: David, you mentioned earlier the relationship with the Lords and that there are things you do corporately across the two Houses, though there is an awful lot you do not. You suggested that having a strong Clerk of the House/chief executive actually enhanced the chances of making that work. I put the reverse of that to you: one thing that both Houses are jealous of is the position of Clerk of the House and Clerk of the Parliaments, and their separation might prevent a more corporate administration of the Palace.

David Natzler: There are two answers to that. First, I obviously did not put it clearly enough that the argument about our relationship with the Lords, which I know interests you, is about having that single point of contact. I believe it should be the Clerk but if you say it is Suma Chakrabarti in charge, then he is the single point of contact. It is an argument for the single point, as opposed to the two pillars. It is not a specific argument that it has to be the Clerk who gets on with the House of Lords.

Q224 Mr Heath: It is still a bicameral administration you are suggesting.

David Natzler: For bits of it that will always be the case. The second point is the fact that if the relationship is Clerk of the House to Clerk of the Parliaments, as it is now, it is extremely close. I spent much of yesterday evening in his office. We understand one another and we have broadly similar responsibilities, in this case for security governance. If you have a two-pillar model—this is what I was trying to argue—who is to be the accepted interlocutor for our sister institution? You may not think that is a strong argument.

Q225 Chair: First, that is a good argument. I put it to you that we are a bicameral Parliament, and there is built in to that bicameral nature an inherent conflict between the two Chambers. That is why we have two rather than one. But it does not follow from that that you have to have completely separate Clerks' services at the two ends, does it? After all, the Scottish Government is certainly constitutionally opposed to the Westminster Government, but it shares a single, common civil service. To get to that, you said in your opening statement, Mr Natzler, words to the effect of greater co-operation with the Lords. If you wanted to get to greater co-operation with the Lords, but also clear autonomy for the two Clerks at each end while they were Clerks, is that not an argument for having a single chief executive? They could gradually take over lots of the obvious common services, in the Lords as well, running a single commission for both Houses, with the Clerk of the Parliaments and the Clerk of the Commons underneath that.

David Natzler: I think you're saying to me—I am sorry if I am being dense—is it a good idea to have a single chief executive controlling large amounts of the parliamentary service in both Houses? I am agnostic on that. I don't think it is going to happen because I don't think the House of Lords is going to agree. It may or may not be a good idea.

I would like to emphasise how much we already have by way of that. I am not sure how happy all these experiences are, but we have a joint department that runs ICT; a joint estates department because obviously we are joined with that; visitor services are the same; the procurement function is now run together so it is a single procurement service that happens to be based in the Lords; the archives are joint and so on. I do not want to underestimate how much is already together. If you are saying, "Could we do more?" I think

it is fair to say that at this end we have an appetite, but it has to be matched. There is no annexation going on.

Q226 Mr Watts: Can I take you back to delegation below the Management Board? That is where I think most Members have a problem: they perceive that to get anything done in the House of Commons, they have to go to the top because when they try to enter the process at a lower level, nothing seems to happen. An example would be queuing into the House of Commons, which was a major problem. The solution brought to the Administration Committee was to restrict the number of people coming into the building rather than find a solution to get more people through in a reasonable time. Once we went to the top, we got some common sense and they put extra facilities in so that we could get more visitors in and then look for a long-term solution.

I am trying to see what your view of delegation is. Why have we got what appears to be a blockage from the decision makers? You touched on that earlier. When a decision is taken, why is it sometimes difficult to get it implemented? It seems we have to go to the top to resolve simple issues rather than have them dealt with at a lower level.

David Natzler: I will start on that. That is a candid assessment and obviously it is depressing for me and my colleagues to hear that, but I recognise—

Q227 Valerie Vaz: We do tell you frequently.

David Natzler: I recognise some of what you say. I am not sure that it is necessarily simple issues. I think we handled queuing badly. We didn't see the problem for too long—I said that sometimes we missed issues under our own nose—and didn't realise what an impact that was having on the place and on the confidence that Members had in our ability to run the Palace. I have been encouraged not to look backwards, so I won't.

We want to empower people further down to feel they can take difficult decisions. One of the difficulties that staff have at all levels here, in all departments, is that every Member is equivalent. That is to say, as a customer, you are all valued and entitled to the best possible service. I hope that that is the message you get from staff and that they try to treat you like that.

Q228 Ian Paisley: When I was coming through security one day, there were horrendous queues, and I heard a member of staff saying, "Blame your MP for this. Write to them—it is their fault." Now, because I am such a nice fellow, I did not challenge that, but there was a side of me that wanted to pop them on the nose, because that queue was not my fault.

Q229 Chair: This is an important issue. The customers are actually the public. We are the agents.

David Natzler: You are also customers for some of the services we provide, such as office services and catering.

Q230 Chair: It is not a term I would use myself, but ultimately if we are going to use the customer-provider relationship, the customers of this Parliament are the public. They are our employers.

These are minor examples, but they are important. I came through Black Rod's Garden a week ago yesterday at lunch time. It was raining and there was a group of members of the public trying to get in who were stuck in the rain. There was space in the search area for them to be brought in. I spoke to the lady security officer in charge and suggested that since they were getting soaked that might be a good idea. She then went into a convoluted explanation about how there was no possibility of that because people might run through between the search arches—although there are armed police to deal with that—and so the people were left outside. It is part of the same attitude that you see down the chain. Someone needs to grip it. I am very unclear about whether anybody is gripping it.

David Natzler: Two things: these issues both relate to security and, as we have said, we are doing our best—I am doing my best—urgently to implement recommendations originally made some considerable time ago, as Sir Oliver will remember, for the management of security here. That will include—this is no secret—looking at the security officer presence. They are not our staff, but are acting under contract to us. That is an area where we know we can do a lot better for our customers, or, if you don't like that word, for the public. As public servants we are very keenly aware that they are ultimately who we serve. We can do a lot better for the public on queuing and on other things that we offer them.

Q231 Mr Watts: I just want to take that one step further. It seems to me that there needs to be clarification on delegation. First of all, people need to know what they are expected to do and need to be held accountable for it if it does not happen. Would you support a system that, for example, named the person who was being held accountable in the process? I raise that because, for example, in the past couple of weeks we have been grappling—still—with the issue of the roof on Portcullis House. If you look back into the records of the House of Commons, even eight or nine years ago—that is not that far away—there is no report that says who is in charge of that. There is a major problem but no one has been held accountable because nobody knows who was responsible at the time.

David Natzler: The answer to your first question is yes, I do favour a system, where one does not exist, in which we know who is ultimately accountable—and not only ultimately, but who is immediately accountable for the actions that they take. So, for example, with the secretariat of this Committee I think you know to whom it is that you should address any complaints. He is sitting next to your Chair. To be fair, that is how a lot of our systems do work. Now, I don't think you want me to discuss the roof of Portcullis House—

Chair: We have not got time.

David Natzler: I would love to discuss—perhaps outside the room—who was responsible and who is now responsible. We are at least clear about who is going to be accountable for fixing the roof.

Q232 Valerie Vaz: To follow up on that, I understand that there are letters of delegation that go down to people to do work. Do you have a time frame on those letters? What happens to them—do you get replies?

David Natzler: There are not replies. The letter tells somebody, “This is your budget for the year.” They are annual letters of delegation.

Q233 Valerie Vaz: So it is not a work programme.

David Natzler: It is not a work programme. It is a letter of delegation but it says what you are responsible for. So I sign them off for the directors general, and some directors general will then pass on further letters down the chain.

Q234 Valerie Vaz: And you don’t expect a response?

David Natzler: Well I get a signed letter back.

Andrew Walker: We sign the letters.

David Natzler: We get an acceptance back.

Q235 Valerie Vaz: Acceptance back, but not when it is going to be delivered, whatever it is you want delivered.

Myfanwy Barrett: We have a general delegation letter, which says what your responsibilities are that you sign and return to your line manager; and then each year you have a forward job plan which says what things you are going to be delivering in that year. So I think the delegations and the accountabilities are clear.

Q236 Valerie Vaz: Is that just to the heads of department?

Myfanwy Barrett: It depends on the department. You delegate down to the level you think appropriate for your services.

David Natzler: Can we provide you with a note on that which maybe includes a letter because they are not secret?

Q237 Jacob Rees-Mogg: Are there any things we can discover from what happened in the changes to security which seems to be the issue of nobody being in overall control?

Most Members still think that the Sergeant at Arms is in control and if they have a security question they go to him but there is actually somebody in overall charge whose name I only discovered when we got a memo from him for this Committee. In relation to the Clerk, didn't that simply create confusion by trying to separate the roles, take away and undermine the historic role, and leave general confusion with nobody knowing who is in charge? We should be very aware of that in any changes we think of making.

David Natzler: On the general point I am sure that we can learn from the way that we are currently handling what will be, I hope, a change in the simple lines of accountability for security, which is not necessarily the same as access. I am sure there are lessons to be learned on the value of clarity and accountability in any system that you recommend so that if you are discontented, as everybody is with something, you will know to whom to go and, if not satisfied, to whom to take it further. Yes, I hope it will be a tight lesson in how to do these things.

Q238 Sir Oliver Heald: As you mentioned to me in passing, is it possible to give us a note about the interaction on security between the overall Whitehall security zone, the way in which the Palace interacts with that and the requirements of the estate as a world heritage site? The interaction of the three has a bearing on this issue of access and security.

David Natzler: I am sure we can compile a note on that.

Chair: This is not a question. I note that one of you—I apologise because I cannot remember who it was—referred to the practice in the National Audit Office. If the Committee agrees, I shall ask the Comptroller and Auditor General to let us have a note about how those arrangements work in the NAO.

Ms Barrett, Mr Natzler, Mr Walker, thank you very much indeed for your evidence and for being candid with us.

David Natzler: Now you have me worried. I didn't realise I was being candid.

Chair: There is no reason to be worried. Thank you. We are done.