



House of Commons Governance Committee

Oral evidence: House of Commons Governance, HC 692

Thursday 27 November 2014

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 27 November 2014.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Dr Emma Crewe](#)
- [Andrew Kennon](#)
- [Andrew McDonald](#)
- [Andrew McDonald](#)

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Members present: Sir Oliver Heald MP (Chair); Mr David Heath MP; Ian Paisley MP; Jacob Rees-Mogg MP; Valerie Vaz MP.

Questions 580-660

Witness: **Andrew McDonald**, former Chief Executive, Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, gave evidence

Q580 Sir Oliver Heald, Chair: Jack Straw is away today, so he has asked me to take the Chair. I think one or two Members are away, but we have generally been sitting three or four times a week, so that is probably understandable.

Can I start by asking you about this question of splitting the current post of Clerk and chief executive? What do you see as the decisive reasons for wanting to do that?

Andrew McDonald: Yes, certainly, and may I say to the Committee how pleased I am to be here this morning? I am happy, obviously, to be of any assistance that I can be to the Committee, either on the evidence that I have submitted or on any other topics.

Q581 Chair: We fully understand that these will be your personal views, and that you are not speaking for IPSA, which you used to be in charge of, or any other organisation. We are very grateful to you for coming because of your background, having worked in the civil service in various roles and then having had your knowledge of the House as IPSA chief.

Would you like to make a few remarks about the splitting of the role and what you see as the main reasons?

Andrew McDonald: I think there are two factors which are decisive, to my mind. One is job size. One has here two very significant component parts within this role. If one were to leave aside for a moment questions of procedural expertise and just talk about leading an organisation which had, in round terms, 2,000 staff and a budget of £200 million, one would have a full-time chief executive with the generic skills associated with that role. Then there is a clearly heavily loaded role associated exclusively with the procedures of the House. It seems to me that there are, just in terms of job size, two roles. If one focuses specifically on the skill sets required to discharge those two roles, there is some overlap between the two, but not very much. One has to be looking for a renaissance man or woman to cover the ground required and to cover the full range of skills implicit in those two component parts. Both job size and skill sets lead me to suggest that we split the roles.

Q582 Chair: One point that has been made to us is that you would have to have absolute clarity about who does what in the split. Do you agree with that?

Andrew McDonald: That is undoubtedly desirable. Elegance and precision in job design and organisational design is something that one should aim at, but it is rarely obtainable in practice. In absolute terms, one might be able to sort out 90% of the responsibilities going to one role or another. What is crucial in making any organisational change or change in job design work is to think about what are in some ways misleadingly referred to as the softer aspects of change: ensuring that one has addressed the questions of perception there may be in the House around this role or roles and ensuring that one has looked at the person specification as well as the role specification, so that one has got people in the two roles who are likely to collaborate and to deal with any overlaps in a collegiate way that is in the overall interests of the House.

Q583 Chair: You have said that you would like us to send a clear signal by appointing a CEO to whom the Clerk reports. Why do you favour that?

Andrew McDonald: First, I think there is one option that one should set aside, which is parity between the two roles and two reporting lines going into the Speaker. That is the course that is most likely to lead to confusion and most likely to require the Speaker to act as a referee. Unless one finds remarkable people who are remarkably collegiate all the time, I put that aside as the least desirable.

One is left with a straightforward choice between which of the two should be the senior position. If one has the CEO as the more senior of the two, there is likely to be clarity that the House's administrative business, its financial business and its management in the short term of the refurbishment project will be taken very seriously, with the appropriate skills applied at the top of the shop. I do not think that arrangement need in any way impinge upon or impugn the procedural excellence and expertise required from the Clerk.

If you flip that the other way around, one is asking a lot of the two post holders. One is asking a chief operating officer to come in and report to the Clerk with a brief that is

inherently more difficult to define. Where are the boundaries in accounting officer responsibilities, for example? Where are the boundaries as regards leading the 2,000 members of staff?

One is more likely to be able to get the clarity that I was describing earlier with the chief executive in the lead, with the additional benefit of—I am clearly making a judgment here on the arrangements as I have seen them—giving that message that the House prizes expertise in the management of its resources, whether that is human capital or financial capital, and risk, because the management of risk is going to be critical through the refurbishment programme. In some ways, I see risks for the House on a scale that is, dare I say it, approximate to the events of 2009, in that it is all too easy to see how, if the refurbishment project hits choppy water—there are inherent risks that that might arise—the project could be seen from the outside, although wrongly, to my mind, as MPs looking after their interests and their own comforts in this building. Those risks need to be managed from the start. I would rather have the top public official reporting to the Commission and the Speaker to be somebody likely to be well versed in those skills.

Q584 Ian Paisley: Andrew, you spoke about the generic skills of a chief executive. Give us some guidance: what are those skills? What is required?

Andrew McDonald: I think if one were drawing up, in the jargon, a person specification for the role, I would be looking clearly for expertise and experience in the leadership of large numbers of staff, and the same with respect to significant budgets. I would look for an understanding of and expertise in the management of risk and assurance and competence and confidence in the management of stakeholders both within an organisation and externally.

If, for these purposes, we assume that the CEO post holder would not come from within the organisation, I would be looking for evidence that the potential candidate had the ability to acquire an empathy with the new organisation in which he was working—not necessarily to be an expert in its business, but to have shown earlier in his or her career the flexibility to adapt to new environments.

Q585 Ian Paisley: What sort of target audience would we look at in order to recruit such a person?

Andrew McDonald: Continuing to assume that it would be the senior of the two roles, I would go out very broadly to the market. I think these are generic skills, and I think one is likely to find them in the private, public or third sectors, so I would not constrain the search, and obviously I would support it with a search agency.

Q586 Jacob Rees-Mogg: You say in your evidence that if the roles were split and the Clerk were to be the senior post, the Clerk would be the accounting officer. Could the Clerk be the principal accounting officer and the chief executive an additional accounting officer?

Andrew McDonald: I do not claim particular expertise, but I understand that that would be a possible arrangement. I think if one were to go down that route though, one would have to ask: why make life more difficult than one needs to? As all Committee members clearly know, the basic notion underlying the accounting officer is that one has clarity about who ultimately is responsible for the proper discharge of public money. I would rather have the accounting officer responsibility sitting very closely with the active discharge of those responsibilities through leadership or projects such as the refurbishment. I agree that there is a possibility of an additional accounting officer role sitting below the primary accounting officer role; I am just not sure one would gain very much from it.

Q587 Jacob Rees-Mogg: Leading on to the next question, you are concerned that if the Clerk were accounting officer during restoration and renewal, their professional formation as a Clerk would ill suit them for the heavy financial and programme management responsibilities associated with the project. Could you expand on that? What would you expect in terms of financial and programme management responsibilities?

Andrew McDonald: Yes, happily. In terms of my understanding of the current professional formation of the Clerks, it is largely within the confines of this organisation, and it is largely—there are clearly exceptions—focused on the development of deep expertise in the procedures of this House. To a greater extent now, it is supplemented by some scope for secondments to other organisations, and for many years now there has been an arrangement whereby one of the Clerks has a stint in the Cabinet Office as the parliamentary liaison officer. Whether everybody would see that as broadening experience in that part of the Cabinet Office, I don't know, but I am not sure that those sorts of secondments and that sort of broadening of experience are sufficient by themselves to give the deep experience that I think one should be looking for, in terms of programme management, risk assurance and financial management. With the chief executive and, ideally, the accounting officer as well—because I would have the two married together—I would expect that the prospective post holder would have run construction projects and IT projects, and would have learnt from an early stage in his or her career the programme and project management disciplines that are more likely to keep those things under control.

Talking from my own experience, the way in which I learnt to run projects and programmes was by a bit of training at the start, but then by doing them, and spending a number of years doing them. Probably the period of my career when I learnt most about proper programme and project management was when I spent four years in the 1990s running a big construction project. That shaped my whole outlook, not only to running projects and programmes, but to the development of teams—the way in which one brought people on, the way one looked at the development of their careers and the way one invested in those careers. I would expect that sort of experience to be the lion's share of his or her prior career.

Q588 Valerie Vaz: As the Chair said, we are very grateful for you coming and giving us the benefit of your expertise and for your written evidence. I want to start with an intriguing point that you made, I think in the first lot of evidence, about the Speaker referring the named person, whoever that is—whether it is a split of chief executive or Clerk—directly to the Queen rather than going to the Prime Minister. Do you want to expand on that?

Andrew McDonald: Yes, happily—and here I own up to being what I suppose some would call a constitutional anorak, having spent three years as the constitution director in what was then the Department for Constitutional Affairs in the early 2000s. It just seems to me inherently curious, at its best, that here we have the most senior public official, an appointed role, within the legislature, and yet the Executive has a hand in advising the sovereign. I think it is in the interests of the legislature that that whole process, prior to the recommendation arriving with the sovereign, should be in the hands of the legislature. If one is going to take that view, I think that does have some implications for the design of the appointment process, because it would seem to me to be improper in a different way if the Speaker were to run the whole process himself and then be giving advice to the sovereign as well.

I have a sort of model in mind—I know that examples drawn from IPSA experience do not necessarily land immediately with MPs, but I think the IPSA case here is helpful. The process that has been developed, further to the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009 and then two rounds now of appointments, has the Speaker standing back from the initial selection process. There is an independent panel now in this case. One would expect that independent panel to have Members of Parliament sitting on it, and then recommendations going to the Speaker, with the expectation that the Speaker, unless he has very good reasons to the contrary, would respect the recommendations coming from the panel. If one has that sort of two-stage process, then it seems to me to be perfectly reasonable for the Speaker to be the office holder advising the sovereign—and, candidly, one removes the Executive from the process.

Q589 Valerie Vaz: Which leads me quite nicely on to the next set of questions. Could you clarify what you mean by opening up the process, say for the chief executive? I think there is a suggestion that you think it should be an internal process for the Clerk. Is that right?

Andrew McDonald: I think it is an arguable point. For the present purposes, let us assume that there is a chief executive and Clerk in that hierarchical order. I think with a chief executive there is no good reason not to go outside. It is the norm for public appointments, and I would do that.

I think there are some public appointments where one just has to ask oneself whether or not it adds any value to go outside an organisation. After all, in terms of expertise in the ways of this organisation, it sits within the four walls of this organisation, for the most part. I guess there is an increasing argument that, given the other legislatures within the UK, one might attract a field from there and equally one might attract a field from other legislatures elsewhere. I simply do not know enough about the strength of that argument, but I could be persuaded quite easily that there is a field out there and, consequently, that it should be opened up. So I do not have terribly strong views as to—

Q590 Valerie Vaz: When you said “internal”, do you just mean within the House?

Andrew McDonald: Yes.

Q591 Valerie Vaz: So within the Clerks area or internal and open to everybody if they have the appropriate experience?

Andrew McDonald: I wouldn't envisage that it should be restricted to one cadre of staff. It may well be that that cadre of staff have been particularly well placed through their professional formation to secure the post, if its job design is the one that I was describing earlier on, but it would seem to me to be more likely to land uncomfortably with colleagues in the House administration if one restricted it in that way.

Q592 Valerie Vaz: You touched a bit on the process. How would you see the two processes—the chief executive's and the Clerk's—in terms of the appointments? You mentioned it should be slightly removed from the Speaker. I suppose I would say that the Speaker is accountable for Members and it is slightly different from IPSA, because IPSA should be independent from Members. So I see the process as being slightly different. How would you envisage the two processes, given that the Speaker is ultimately accountable to Members in the House?

Andrew McDonald: I think it is a really important point. I am not suggesting that the Speaker be removed from the process. I would suggest that if the process were to be along the lines I was describing a few moments back, the Speaker would have the right to say, "No, I don't agree with the names coming forward," because ultimately that relationship has got to work. If there is not an effective working relationship between the Speaker and the person who is his most senior official, then the thing is doomed from the start. I think the Speaker should have the ability to raise the red card and say no, but for candidates being selected for him by others. So he would certainly have a role in that regard.

Q593 Valerie Vaz: So no Member involvement in that selection at all?

Andrew McDonald: No, I would have Members on the panel—perhaps Members from the Commission, for example—but I would not have the Speaker at the first stage.

Valerie Vaz: Thank you very much.

Q594 Mr Heath: There is a risk of getting into a constitutional wrangle with Andrew, which I am not sure is very profitable to us, but I have to say I think the last person I would want to have a veto on the appointment of a Clerk would be the Speaker, who is to some degree to be reigned in by that Clerk.

Andrew McDonald: Before addressing that directly, let me just stand back again from the process. One can have the best organisational design and the best job design available, but unless one gets the right people into the key roles, this is going to be very difficult to land. So the choice of individuals and doing all one can to make sure one has relationships that work is a crucial part of the whole. If one has a panel prior to the Speaker's involvement, making sure that one has got individuals coming through who have got, if I can put it this way, the

right timbre—with not only the appropriate skills, but also the appropriate qualities, the resilience and independence of mind—then one is candidly constraining the Speaker’s choice.

There may, in the process that I describe, be a certain to-ing and fro-ing in extreme cases between the Speaker and the panel, but one is not giving the Speaker a free hand to choose anybody that he might wish to choose. His field is being determined for him by the prior panel. I think that that way, there is the best chance of making sure that one has got the skills one needs but also a compatibility in the working relationship that one needs if the thing is going to cohere in practice.

Q595 Mr Heath: I simply do not agree on that. I think that the Clerk is for the House, not for the Speaker. Can I also bring you back to the other rather nice constitutional point, which is the fact that it is a Crown appointment, at the end of the day? Do you agree that that actually provides some very important protections to the Clerk?

Andrew McDonald: The fact that it is an appointment, as I understand, by letters patent ultimately is helpful. I do not think that that is something that should be changed. I could see why the Committee might want, for example, to buttress some of those protections in the course of its work, particularly if the Committee were to end up with an arrangement whereby it were to be CEO and a Clerk. With all those protections, one has to think about how usable they are. One thing that the Committee might want to consider, if one of the anxieties might be that an overbearing chief executive would not wish clerkly advice that is inconvenient to the CEO to go forward to the Speaker or the Commission, is to put in a protection to make sure that the Clerk had a right of audience with the Commission. If one were to do that, it is the sort of protection that would work if it was not used. If it was used with any frequency, I think its efficacy would disappear but also the relationships would be blown. I think protections by way of backstop—appointment by letters patent is one—seem to me to be desirable and it might be worth buttressing them in the work that you are doing. However, I would not want to see those protections being used too often. If they are, something is going badly wrong.

Q596 Mr Heath: Just one observation, if I may, Sir Oliver: I suspect that the involvement of the Executive goes back to a position of the Leader of the House—that much older and much more august position than the parvenu Prime Minister.

Andrew McDonald: Yes, that sounds right.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Andrew. That has been extremely helpful, and we are very grateful to you for coming and giving evidence today.

Andrew McDonald: My pleasure. Thank you all very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Tom O’Leary**, Head of Public Engagement and Learning, **Steve O’Connor**, Director of Technology, Parliamentary ICT, **Martin Trott**, Head of Continuous Improvement in Parliament, and **Richard Tapner-Evans**, Director of Catering, gave evidence.

Q597 Chair: Good morning. Thank you very much for coming. We are very grateful to you for giving evidence. I was going to start questions by just asking each of you what interaction you have with the Management Board. I do not know if you would like to start, Mr O’Leary.

Tom O’Leary: My interaction is relatively infrequent. I occasionally prepare papers. If I am overseeing or initiating a particular project, that paper will go through via my management structure to the Management Board. I have been in the organisation nearly eight years now, and I think I have been to the Management Board once, when I was involved in a project looking at the future design of the Houses of Parliament, which was a blue-skies thinking project. Other than that, I have not actually been to the Management Board. I have just prepared papers, as I have said.

Q598 Chair: Is there any reason why you have not actually personally gone along when you have prepared the paper?

Tom O’Leary: No, I think it is just generally that I am what is known as a head of section; I am below a director level here in the organisation, so it would usually be my director or my director general in the case of DIS, which is the part of the organisation I work in, who would sponsor that paper and therefore present it to the Management Board. I think, from my understanding, that is why I would not personally attend.

Q599 Chair: But in a sense you would be the horse’s mouth, wouldn’t you, because you had written the paper?

Tom O’Leary: Yes, although I think that paper goes through a lot of editing, back and forth between myself and my managers, so I think in the case where that occurs they are usually very much across the information itself; and I am obviously to-ing and fro-ing with the Management Board secretariat over the details in the paper. Yes, obviously if I was there I could add something to it, but I do not think the papers have suffered as a result.

Q600 Chair: What about you, Mr Trott, in the continuous improvement section? Have you had a lot to do with the Management Board?

Martin Trott: Heading up the House’s savings programme for the final year of the programme that finished earlier this year, there was obviously quite a lot of interaction then with the Management Board. It was really important that they were on board with what we were doing, and so there were regular updates for them and questions for them to answer.

Introducing the continuous improvement approach, which is a bicameral approach: again, it was really important to get the Management Board on side from the start, so I met, a year ago, the joint Management Boards of both Houses, told them about this concept that is widely adopted across the public sector, they agreed to introduce it bicamerally, and since then there have been regular updates for the board, and indeed for the board of the other House.

Q601 Chair: And have you been along yourself and spoken to them?

Martin Trott: From time to time, yes.

Q602 Chair: What about you, Mr O'Connor?

Steve O'Connor: I have been with the House almost eight years. I have been to the Management Board twice in that time—so very similar to Mr O'Leary. So I have prepared papers, but they are often represented by my director general at the board.

Q603 Chair: Mr Tapner-Evans?

Richard Tapner-Evans: I have been here about two and a half years, and I have been to the Management Board once, but exactly the same situation as Mr O'Connor, in the fact that my director general is the point of contact on the Management Board and I brief him and give him the information to take to the Management Board on any occasions where there is an issue around catering.

Q604 Chair: I can understand the formal nature of that, but often in private industry the person who prepared the paper would go along as well; but that does not happen here.

Martin Trott: I think it happens occasionally. It depends on how many papers the board might be looking at, and how much to-ing and fro-ing that might be in practical terms, for people to go and visit the board. So sometimes those colleagues have said it is for the head of the department to put that forward.

Q605 Chair: What about this one? Decision making: is it a bit slow here, and do you feel you need to go through rather a large number of bodies to get anything done? Mr O'Leary.

Tom O'Leary: Yes. I was going to talk to the Committee about a recent example, just to demonstrate it. I work in the area of public engagement, and I am overseeing the 2015 anniversaries programme, which is celebrating the anniversaries of de Montfort and Magna Carta respectively. That particular project: because it is high profile and goes across both Houses, I work in a bicameral team, and my department is 30% House of Lords, 70% House of Commons, in terms of how it is resourced.

The journey—and I have to write it down to remember it all—starts out with my boss; it then goes up the House of Commons tree to directors who sit above me, to the Clerk. It then goes off on a journey to the Management Board, which we have just referred to. It then goes, in my case, to the group for information for the public, which is a bicameral group that considers public engagement across both Houses. It then goes off to the Administration Committee if there is relevant information in there that it is thought the Administration Committee should consider. In this case, there was. Because we are dealing with art, it goes to the Works of Art Committee. We then have to make sure the Commission is aware. I then have to brief the Speaker. We then set up a Members’ advisory group. When that is all done, it’s off to the House of Lords, which has more or less a similar process. We have the relevant director; the Management Board; the Information Committee, which mirrors the Administration Committee; the Lords Works of Art Committee, because it goes across that space; the House Committee; and the Lord Speaker.

Having done all that, we then try to get the programme going. One of the observations I would make is that, despite getting all that backing—that can take a very long time and be quite exhausting at times—it does not necessarily translate into the organisation saying, “Right, we are going to get on with this.” Colleagues are often extremely helpful and collaborative, but the same decision does not necessarily come down to them, so you are having to rely on their ability to swing into action to help you. Often they do, and we get things done, but that process is very exhausting. It is not always written down as to which way you are supposed to go about things. By the time you have gone through that, you sometimes have little energy left actually to do the thing you set out to do. If things were more streamlined and more coherent, it would be helpful.

Also, one of the factors in there is that you are not necessarily sure who trumps who, to put it bluntly. So although you may get a decision from one of those bodies, if another body disagrees, I am not always clear as to who necessarily has precedent, and that, in itself, can be very confusing.

Q606 Chair: Mr Trott, you worked on the Tebbitt review in ’07, which was looking at the same issues. Do you think it led to any improvements?

Martin Trott: We were concentrating on a unified Management Board then—slimming down the Management Board, bringing in externals to the board and generally professionalising it up a bit. We looked at professionalising, if you like, the Clerk and the role of the Chief Executive, and at strengthening that role with an Office of the Chief Executive. We looked at Member Committees too. We looked at the relationship between the Commission and the Finance and Services Committee and the Administration Committee, and we decided that, although, on paper, it might look quite complicated, all those people had a legitimate interest in what was going on. So we decided not to make big changes then.

We also looked, of course—I am sure you will come on to this—at splitting the role.

Chair: We will be dealing with that in a minute.

Martin Trott: Yes, but going back to your question about whether we are slow at decision making, my chain is not, thankfully, quite as long as Tom’s, but I do recognise quite

a lot of what he said. I won't go into all the details, but, at present, I have a steering group and the Management Board. Ultimately, I report quarterly to the Finance and Services Committee, and I quite often appear in front of that Committee. I do the same at the other end, because I, too, am bicameral, so these things have to go up through the chain in parallel. But that is only one paper for me to write. I have to write the paper in such a way that it suits them all, and I then set it on its journey. If diary dates work out well, it can all happen within about a month, and the issue can come back to me. So I find it quite difficult to make a suggestion about how things could be streamlined, bearing in mind the legitimate interest I think all those bodies have in what I do.

Q607 Chair: Well, Mr O'Connor, what do you make of it, because PICT is slightly different, isn't it?

Steve O'Connor: It is slightly different. We still follow a similar route. We go through both Management Boards, in the Commons and in the Lords. We have two Committees that are particularly interested in what we do—the Administration Committee in the Commons, and the Information Committee in the Lords. But we have another board, which is a bicameral board, that has oversight of ICT investment in Parliament. It is called PICTAB—the PICT Advisory Board. That contains Management Board members from both Houses. I have to say I think that is a very helpful group, because it brings together the key decision makers from both Houses to really thrash out where our ICT investment should be in any given year or any given planning period. That gives me and my teams very clear direction on how we should invest and what we should be doing. It is an extra step, but it is written down; it is a clear part of our governance, and I find that very helpful.

Q608 Chair: Mr Tapner-Evans, do you have any views on the scenic-route approach to decision making?

Richard Tapner-Evans: I do, actually. Parts of the organisation mean that things become slower, because there are so many different stakeholders and it is a complex organisation. But I have to say that my experience in the two and a half years that I have been here as catering director is that we have made some massive changes very quickly over a very short period. For instance, we have implemented third-party banqueting hire in the House. That wasn't even thought of two and a half years ago. We have made massive cost savings across the board, almost halving the catering subsidy, since the beginning of this Parliament. And we have gone through a massive restructuring. In my area, I see parts that move more slowly than others because of the stakeholder engagement, but with the very clear direction that I have had in catering—my cost savings targets and a very clear direction from the Administration Committee; its guidance has helped enormously—we have managed to do a lot of things very quickly and very effectively.

Q609 Ian Paisley: Tom, how easy is it for you to engage with senior management in the decision-making process?

Tom O’Leary: It’s quite easy, actually. In my experience, they are very visible and are available and I can go and consult them. Despite the slightly tortuous approach that I described throughout that process, people are available. I can get to see the Clerk or my director general, so I would say they are pretty available to me.

Q610 Ian Paisley: Do you get decisions from them quickly, or is it tortuous?

Tom O’Leary: Yes, I do. As Richard described, some decisions come remarkably quickly for such a large and complex organisation. I had the experience recently of something happening in two weeks in order to project images of poppies on to the Big Ben tower for the first world war commemorations. I managed to get all the permissions and everything lined up in two weeks, whereas some other stuff, which I have described, can be quite tortuous, so it sometimes varies, depending on the project, but I usually find getting decisions from senior staff pretty straightforward. It’s the knowing who is actually in charge of which bit of the permissions process with the Committees I have described that I find more difficult.

Q611 Ian Paisley: Steve, in terms of support from senior decision makers and management, given that you have to function in both Houses and across them, do you have a good customer there? Do they know what they want from you?

Steve O’Connor: Increasingly so, I would say. The advisory board I talked about earlier has really developed over the last two years, so it’s taking a much broader view on priorities, really understanding what the priorities are and giving very good guidance. That has taken time—it has not happened overnight—and it’s still a process that it is going through. But this year, for example, the work done to corral all the various investments that people wanted to make into a coherent plan was very thorough and was very open to good discussion and challenge, and we have come up with a very solid position. From my perspective, that’s a good customer: I know what I need to do now and I have been involved in that discussion all the way through.

Chair: Could we bring in Valerie? She has a quick supplementary question.

Q612 Valerie Vaz: You said that you were able to do the poppy projection, which looked very nice from outside and on television—we didn’t know that was happening and it was very good—but was that because there was a deadline and you had to do it by a certain time? I am just wondering about deadlines. Who gives you deadlines when you do your work? The issue is the reporting back, isn’t it?

Tom O’Leary: In that case, Remembrance Sunday was clearly the target and we couldn’t miss it. We were able to communicate to the stakeholders that we needed a decision within a very short time frame, and everybody came up to the mark. In my experience, where it gets tortuous is where it involves lots of different people. I tend to get things done by narrowing the field of people I need to work with, to put it bluntly. When I am required to involve lots of colleagues from right across the piece, as with the 2015 project, it is a case of

getting the bandwagon rolling through town a bit more, whereas with the poppies, I knew exactly who I had to go to and everybody was very co-operative. It is broader projects where, at least in my experience, it gets tortuous and lengthy.

Q613 Valerie Vaz: That's what I mean about a deadline. You had a deadline in that case, but I don't know whether a deadline is built in when you put your papers forward. Perhaps something takes a long time because there isn't a deadline.

Martin Trott: There quite often is some kind of deadline. There is something that needs to be decided or endorsed or there is some question to answer, and inevitably that has to be done in time. A short deadline does focus minds, of course. But in answer to the general question, I think that our Management Board is extremely approachable. Heads of departments are well known to most of us on a personal level and very approachable.

Q614 Jacob Rees-Mogg: Thank you all very much for coming. This is a question for everybody but, Mr Trott, as you were associated with the Tebbit review, perhaps you could answer first. Do you think the role of chief executive and Clerk should be split? If so, how do you think that should be structured? Or do you still think that the Tebbit review was right and it should not be split?

Martin Trott: I think Sir Kevin Tebbit is coming to speak to you, so I will let him talk about that. My recollection is that we were not there yet with splitting the role. It was talked about but not in the detail that you are talking about it now. The same questions arose then about who would report to whom. It was not being as seriously looked at as it is now.

Having heard some of the evidence before you this time, it seems much more compelling. My view now is that it might be time to split the role. However, it is really important that somebody reports to somebody else and we do not have a dual-headed role. That would be a recipe for confusion. From my point of view, perhaps it is now time, as it was not seven years ago, to split the role, but it is important that we know who is the boss.

Q615 Jacob Rees-Mogg: Who do you think should report to whom?

Martin Trott: Being risk averse, I would say that we already have a Clerk, and a chief operating officer would take some of the burden from the Clerk, so that might be the way forward. It seems to me that whichever way you do it the result is pretty similar: the Clerk is divested of some of the difficulties that he or she has, and is left to look after the legislative process. Therefore, the risk-averse way would be to do it with a chief operating officer reporting to the Clerk at the moment.

Q616 Jacob Rees-Mogg: Thank you. Mr Tapner-Evans, would you like to comment?

Richard Tapner-Evans: I concur with Martin. The only thing I would add is that whichever way you looked at it and whichever person you thought was more responsible—I am certainly not qualified to decide that—

Q617 Jacob Rees-Mogg: You should. Everyone has views on what you do, so it is only fair that you should have views back.

Richard Tapner-Evans: My view is that whichever one of the two obviously distinct roles it is, either one needs to be supported by expert knowledge in each other's field. So if it is the Clerk, there has to be an expert in leading a very complex organisation who advises and guides the Clerk. That is the way I would look at it.

The other way round, if it were the chief executive, there would have to be someone who is very strong constitutionally and can support the chief executive's decisions, whatever they are. I agree with Martin that we need someone at the top and whoever it is, whether a Clerk or a chief executive with the organisational experience, they need to be supported strongly underneath by one or the other.

Q618 Chair: If you had to choose, which would you go for?

Richard Tapner-Evans: I do not know the answer to that, to be honest.

Chair: That is a very honest answer.

Q619 Jacob Rees-Mogg: I want to ask Mr O'Connor and Mr O'Leary if they would like to comment.

Steve O'Connor: I agree with my colleagues. There needs to be a clear person at the top. The House service is at its strongest when it unifies. The worst outcome of this is that we create artificial barriers between departments. What we need to be in future is a more unified organisation: IT working closely with colleagues in the Clerk's department, working closely with colleagues in the Libraries. We have got to join that up.

From my perspective, the role of the Clerk needs to maintain all of its position around the procedural side; there is no doubt about that for me. I have been thinking a lot about this, as you can image, and I think the House might benefit from having a chief executive above the Clerk, with a remit to unify the service and prioritise all of the complex work that the House needs to do.

A good chief executive is not wedded to one part of the service of the organisation they are in. Their remit is to be broad in their thinking and across the piece. I think we are coming to a point where we would benefit from that, but the Clerk should not lose any protections or position or the way they are appointed, because that is key to the way the House runs.

Tom O'Leary: Like my colleagues, I fear a split of the posts. I think this place has enough competing powers within it without creating another one. We all share a worry that you would create a double-headed hydra, or whatever the expression is. My view is that we go after a chief executive in an open and fair competition. The organisation is reaching and going into a place where it is incredibly complex, and we should recruit the best person we

can possibly get. Whether that is internal or external is entirely down to the quality of the candidate. I also think that we need to guarantee the independence of the Clerk so that that constitutional role is not affected by the split. I do not think it is impossible to come up with a solution that delivers both of those things.

Q620 Jacob Rees-Mogg: Do you all generally feel that this would have an effect on your individual areas of activity, or will it simply give you clearer decision making? Would that be your big aim and the big gain that would be had if the roles were clarified and divided? Mr O’Leary, would it somewhat simplify the complexities of what you have had to deal with recently?

Tom O’Leary: Yes. To pick up a phrase one of my colleagues used, the unified service is something that the Tebbit review was commenting on and wants to bring into place. I do not think we have achieved that yet. We have come a long way, certainly in the short time I have been here, but as an organisation we need to be better at investing in change and pushing that change through. A single chief executive with, I would hope, experience of doing that in large, complex organisations would potentially make my life a bit easier.

Q621 Mr Heath: Mr Tapner-Evans, you said earlier that you were grateful to the Administration Committee for its assistance when you were trying to find your budget savings. How do you see the Administration Committee—are they part of the management of the House or do you see them as a sort of consumer group that tells you what is going to cause a fuss?

Richard Tapner-Evans: They are a bit of both, to be honest with you. They play a very important role in sounding out the opinions of MPs and putting forward any operational issues they might have—they all have very different opinions sometimes, so finding that consensus is sometimes actually quite difficult. They also play a role where they give very sound business guidance and advice to help the business forward.

Q622 Mr Heath: So they don’t just moan about the price of a cup of tea?

Richard Tapner-Evans: Sometimes they do, but in a way I would expect that, really, because it is important not just to them but to everybody who works in the House, in terms of costs and what they have in their pocket to pay for food in the House. Armies march on their stomachs and therefore food is always quite an emotive issue. The price of the cup of tea or the quality of a particular item of food in a particular venue is actually quite important to everyone—not just to MPs but to everyone who works in the House.

Q623 Mr Heath: We have another army down the other end of the corridor marching on its separate stomach—this metaphor is not going to get me anywhere, is it? How often do you meet your counterparts in the Lords?

Richard Tapner-Evans: I meet with the Lords on a regular basis—on a one-to-one basis with Tim Laming, who is my counterpart in the Lords. We also have common ground in that we now have some shared services. Our IT services—catering IT services—are all moving towards one shared electronic point of sale system and stock control system.

Q624 Mr Heath: Does that mean you will have common procurement, as well?

Richard Tapner-Evans: We are also moving towards common procurement at this moment. There is a lot more work being done to share resources and the best practice that we each have.

Q625 Mr Heath: So you are going to end up with the only differential being the opening hours of the outlets and what is on the menu—is that right?

Richard Tapner-Evans: Yes.

Q626 Mr Heath: Does that warrant having two organisations?

Richard Tapner-Evans: There is an opinion that we are two very different organisations, but from my point of view there is no reason why those two organisations cannot be run as one. We are moving towards sharing more and more with the Lords, and are gaining the benefits of sharing those things.

Q627 Mr Heath: Some of you are already in a relationship with the Lords. Others are not. Are there any other services about which you think now is the time and we have the opportunity perhaps, with a little bit of good will, to get the two Houses working on a common shared service?

Martin Trott: The starting point is to get them to adopt similar systems in the way Richard has been describing; for example, much of what we are doing with introducing this continuous improvement approach. Because it is bicameral we can learn from each other. We can look at services at one end and see how they are doing it at the other end. That is a very good start in unifying the two before we talk about combining departments of the Houses.

Q628 Mr Heath: So you are doing unification by stealth?

Martin Trott: You could put it that way.

Mr Heath: I would probably be unwise to put it that way.

Q629 Valerie Vaz: I wanted to touch on staff development and training but I was struck by what you were saying, Mr Tapner-Evans. You were very happy with your savings, but have you got happy staff and happy Members? I think the answer to that is probably no.

Richard Tapner-Evans: Since I have been here we have taken customer satisfaction and staff satisfaction extremely seriously. We have regular measures of customer satisfaction through cafeteria surveys. Those statistics have improved in the last two years. The fact that we are doing more sales, which is reducing the cost of catering in the first place shows that we have happier happy customers. Overall, with any food service industry you only usually get to hear about the bad things, rather than the good things. If someone is moaning about something you get to hear about it, whereas if someone is pleased about something it is almost ignored a lot of the time. So, yes, customer satisfaction is improving and we have statistics to back that up.

On staff satisfaction, we realise that a number of staff have been here for a number of years, they are very happy in their jobs and they do a very, very good job. We are constantly looking at ways to develop those staff in areas that they are interested in. We have a number of very talented chefs who regularly win competitions so we develop them all the time and they strive to do better in what they do. The catering industry is one where you move around quite a lot as well. We will develop a lot of junior people within the chef's team who then go on to do bigger and better things within the industry as a whole. So they will move on to Michelin-starred restaurants across the board as well. So there are development opportunities for all of our staff.

Q630 Valerie Vaz: You say that about people moving out. Is that because they are not on permanent contracts and they are not actually members of the House staff?

Richard Tapner-Evans: No, they are on permanent contracts but the catering industry moves a lot and there is only a certain amount of opportunities that are available in an organisation like this, so we would encourage people to look outside and move. But bringing fresh ideas into the House as well means that we give a better service to Members and staff at the same time.

Q631 Valerie Vaz: It is a kind of balance. I talk about institutional memory. There are people who have worked here for a long time who know people, know Members, and know how things work. That helps. There is also the balance of developing them. I think that you can do that. Could each of you just touch on whether you find that in your part of the House organisation you are getting the opportunity to have some sort of development in your careers?

Steve O'Connor: I have been promoted twice since I have worked in Parliament. So from my career point of view, just talking about me for a moment, it has been a fantastic place. I have learned a huge amount and moved on in my career. If I talk about my teams and staff there is a lot of scope for them within the discipline they are working in within IT. So we have a lot of people who move up and take on new roles, new technologies or management roles and whatever they are interested in. I think one area that is difficult is developing your understanding of this institution. It is a complex organisation. If you come in

from the outside it takes a long, long time to really understand what happens. I would not pretend that I do, after eight years. I have encouraged my staff to go and shadow Clerk colleagues; to go and shadow our colleagues in *Hansard* and others. It gives you a snapshot, but those relationships and, I think, more porous movement of skills and knowledge between departments and teams would be very beneficial.

Q632 Valerie Vaz: Do you have a training and development budget?

Steve O'Connor: We do, yes, and we put people through, obviously, technical training, so they can keep up to date with the new technologies; but there is also management and softer skills training. We put all our managers through management training a couple of years ago, which was very beneficial.

Chair: I think we will have to leave it there. I thank each of you for coming to give evidence—it has been extremely helpful to us—and I also thank you for the skills that you have brought to the House, and for all you do to help us.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Andrew Kennon**, Clerk of Committees, **David Vere**, Director of People Development, and **Dr Emma Crewe**, Principal Investigator, Parliamentary Effectiveness Research Programme, SOAS, University of London, gave evidence.

Chair: Good morning to each of you. We are very grateful to you for coming to give evidence. On this occasion Ian Paisley is to start.

Q633 Ian Paisley: Good morning. David, how does the House assist staff in developing their careers?

David Vere: Well, I think we look at it at a number of levels. I think first of all we have an annual performance management process, in which there is intended to be a regular discussion between the manager and each member of staff, in which they review performance and, as a result of that, identify development opportunities that are needed to improve individual skills or progress their career.

In addition to that, we also have a number of ways in which individual staff can assess their own capability through diagnostics, through tools like 360° feedback. From that, we then offer a range of programmes which are either corporate—open to staff across the House—or each department will have their own particular training programme to meet the needs of their own staff, because of course, as you know, each department varies quite considerably its the range of skills and the range of jobs. So we try and achieve a balance of corporate and departmental training, including within that, of course, professional development for those people who are qualified within the House.

Q634 Ian Paisley: Do you feel it is working or could it be improved?

David Vere: I have been in the House now since May, so I am relatively new to the organisation compared to many of my colleagues. One of the things that I have been looking at in my responsibilities around people strategy is to assess whether the balance of training is appropriate. For me, I think there is a need for greater emphasis on some of the leadership and management skills. The organisation has already invested heavily in that, but I think there is still more to be done. I think there are areas, such as project management and financial management, where we again could improve the offering of the training. I think we also need to look at whether we are getting the best value for the money that we invest as an organisation overall, because corporately, I think, our budget is just under £500,000, and each department has its own budget which amounts to something similar. We have got quite a substantial sum of money that we are investing, so we need to be making sure we are getting the best value from that.

Q635 Ian Paisley: Do you feel that the staff generally have a view that they can go on career development, and see their way of cutting through various sectors, and working in various sectors of the House?

David Vere: I think the opportunities are there, but the recent staff survey which we conducted did indicate that in a number of areas staff do not feel they have the time to take to go on some of the training and development that we offer, primarily because of the pace of work, so that is an issue we are looking at, in addressing what is coming out of the survey. I think in different parts of the House there are varying degrees of appetite for learning and development, depending on what individuals' aspirations are for the future.

Q636 Ian Paisley: Turning to the Clerks, should they in principle be treated as a different entity altogether in terms of their training, management and career development, given the skill set that it is considered they require?

David Vere: One would need to recognise that the Clerks have a particular skill set that is necessary in the role that they play in the House. I would expect to see a continuous development programme for Clerks, but at the same time I would expect to see the opportunities to broaden their skills into other areas. We need to look across the House as a whole at how Clerks—and, equally, staff in other Departments, in the other direction—can develop a fuller understanding of the whole business of the House. Clerks already spend time in other departments, but if they spent a significant amount of time in other departments, leading projects, working in finance or working in the information services area, all those things would broaden their skills.

Ultimately, we would be looking to broaden the number of opportunities they have for external secondments. At the moment, there are secondments going on to other parts of Government—the Cabinet Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, for example. I think we would want to look at whether we can broaden the scope of the roles into which Clerks go on secondment. Indeed, that is true of other members of staff in the House. We should not focus exclusively on one Department; this is something we need to look at for the House as a whole to see what combination of development works best for everybody.

Q637 Ian Paisley: Should those secondments be compulsory if you want to progress to the top? The reason I ask is that I used to sit on the recruitment panel for our Chief Constable at home, and we made it compulsory that people had that service outside of the Northern Ireland police service—the Royal Ulster Constabulary—to develop their skill pattern before they came back to go for the higher-rank officerships. Should we have that type of pattern for the Clerk?

David Vere: For me, that depends on what your role specification is for the top jobs in the organisation and the extent to which you are looking for a breadth of capability, as opposed to individuals who are at the top of specialist organisations. But certainly if you are looking for someone who might become a Chief Executive or a chief operating officer of the House, I think one would want to be fairly specific about the range of development experience they have had over the course of their career, particularly at the latter stages, as

they approach the more senior levels of the organisation. I think that would be an important way in which we could strengthen the management skill base of all staff in the House.

Q638 Valerie Vaz: Dr Crewe, you have been looking at the House for a while now. Could you say how long and why?

Dr Crewe: Yes. Thank you very much, to begin with, for inviting me. I am absolutely delighted to have an opportunity to talk about Parliament.

Why? Because I am a specialist in organisations, and I do research, particularly on voluntary organisations and Parliament. I have been doing research on the UK Parliament since about 1998, starting on the Lords and looking more recently at the House of Commons. I am also looking at Parliaments in south Asia and eastern Africa.

I have just completed a three-year project looking at the House of Commons. My main focus was understanding the work of MPs, which I think is undervalued. I do not think the complexity of the work that MPs do is sufficiently recognised. People are extraordinarily cynical about politics, and I think that spills over on to politicians and Parliament. So, I am a huge champion of Parliament, but also of the officials in Parliament. My experience of observing them is that the institution is extremely well run, so in a way, I am a bit puzzled by some of the evidence, which seems to claim that it is not.

Q639 Valerie Vaz: Okay. Perhaps you are talking to the wrong people—I don't know. When are you publishing your report?

Dr Crewe: My book comes out in April 2015. I could give a little more substance to the claim that I think Parliament is well run, if that is useful. Is that appropriate?

Chair: Yes. You could also write to us.

Dr Crewe: In a way, it relates to why I think you need to have one clear person at the top who has experience of parliamentary business, which I define very broadly—not just as very narrow and fusty procedural work but as something much broader than that. I would include what people in the Library do, what people in Committees do, dealing with the media—we have not talked about the media very much. It is an incredibly complex organisation.

What is puzzling is that the kind of complaints I have read have been about mice or about building projects going over budget, but they are not the core business of Parliament. Who claims that the Committee work is not absolutely outstanding? I have watched a particular Committee for two years. I could not do what those Clerks and specialist advisers do. It is not just the Clerks; the specialist advisers produce reports incredibly fast, in a way that, frankly, most academics would not be able to. How many mistakes are made in all the mass of documents that come out and relate to the Chamber?

As far as I am concerned, the deftness with which the officials deal with the core business is very underappreciated. It is partly because they do not really blow their own

trumpet. They are not really here to do that—they are here because they are serving Parliament, and, in a way, they are so busy defending MPs and defending Parliament that they sell themselves a bit short.

Q640 Valerie Vaz: We have not heard evidence of that—in fact, we have heard evidence to the contrary, that Parliament is run quite well, and the Clerks and Committee section in particular. We think they are outstanding and we have heard evidence that they are absolutely outstanding. We could not do the jobs that they do. I do not know whether you are just looking at something slightly different or have heard something slightly different. The basic running of Parliament we think is good; the decision-making process and how that filters down to the rest of the organisation is the issue that we are looking at. Obviously we had certain terms of reference for that. We have heard from staff—we had a staff event, which obviously was not public. It is right that we should listen to the people at the bottom. It is at the top management layer that things seem to be going slightly wrong. I don't think we have ever suggested otherwise—I suggest you look at the evidence that has come out of previous sittings.

Dr Crewe: I have. I have talked to a lot of staff and I have talked to a lot of MPs' staff, as well, about how things are run. My experience is that there is some dissatisfaction. For example, as David was saying, people who are not Clerks should—this has already improved massively, but there is still room for improvement to open things up—be able to become Clerks if they choose to, and not necessarily permanently. It is about that interchange that David was talking about, and I think that there could be a lot of improvements with that.

Q641 Valerie Vaz: You actually said in your written evidence that “any staff should be encouraged to develop expertise in the core of the House of Commons business”. I was just a bit troubled by your next phrase, which was “if they demonstrate the capacity.” Are you saying that it is only a few people—the anointed few?

Dr Crewe: I am partly influenced by the fact that I come from the international development sector, where civil society organisations have appointed people to the top—to the chief executive role—who do not really understand the core of the business. If they have an opportunity to learn about it, great; but if they get parachuted in without necessarily understanding that business, then in my experience they have not done a good job. Not everyone is going to have the capacity to work, for example, as a Committee Clerk—I would not be able to do that job. Clearly you have to have the capacity and the particular skill set to be able to do that kind of job.

Q642 Valerie Vaz: I do not know whether you have seen this, but they are developed quite well. It depends on the teams. The senior Clerk develops people within those teams. They do get there at the end. I am not sure whether you have looked at that.

I will move on to allowing people to go across departments, as you say. It is not necessarily about giving people an extra qualification, but sometimes when you get into the civil service you have a course at Sunningdale. Do you think it would be useful, when people

come into this organisation, to have an induction day—whoever they are, whether they go through the Clerks’ section or anywhere else—or some kind of certificate or qualification? I am reluctant to go down that route, but, as you say, do you think everybody should know the core business?

Dr Crewe: I would not say that necessarily absolutely everybody should. I think that anybody who is interested should certainly have that opportunity, absolutely. There are hugely talented people working in the Library, for example, or in POST or whatever, who I think should be helped to get the qualifications to apply, for example, for a Clerk job. I think that would be brilliant. It would be more than being inducted. There might even be a course in procedure, say, available to them. That kind of opening up of opportunities would be fantastic.

Q643 Valerie Vaz: What does everybody else think?

David Vere: From my perspective, I think that is a direction in which we should go. The challenge is that because of the structure we are in—the previous witnesses referred to it—we are in the holding company stage, where we have a number of relatively independent departments within a corporate whole.

I feel we need to go further to make the service feel much more of a unit. The consequence of that is that people spend a disproportionate amount of their time working within their own department. While they do have a lot of contact, I don’t think it is sufficient to develop the understanding of the core business of the House and the way that other departments work to create that level of understanding.

Q644 Chair: Of course, Andrew, you have been here a long time in many positions. Would you like to tell us what your thoughts are on professional development? Do you think the idea of a professional qualification in parliamentary practice and procedure would be a worthwhile initiative?

Andrew Kennon: This idea has been kicked around with some enthusiasm over the years by some of my colleagues. I am personally a bit doubtful about that. We are not a profession in the sense of doctors or lawyers. I must stress that all of the procedural training is available to everyone. I regularly take people into the Committee Office. The easiest way to give someone from another department experience of being a Clerk is obviously as second Clerk of a Select Committee. I think I have probably got half a dozen people at the moment from Facilities, *Hansard*, the Library. Over half of our A2 Clerks did not come in as fast streamers; they have transferred from other things. I believe that something like six of the Library senior research staff are people who originally came into my department. Please do not underestimate the amount of interchange and opportunity that goes on.

Chair: Of course, we are very grateful for that on this Committee.

Q645 Jacob Rees-Mogg: My first question is directed to Mr Kennon. First, on the division of your time, it occurs to me that, as the Clerk of Committees, you spend much more

of your time managing people and ensuring they are in the right place than poring over “Erskine May”. Is that right? Could you give an idea of what percentage of your time is spent on the most refined matters of procedure and what is spent on management?

Andrew Kennon: A relatively small amount of my time is spent on what you might call procedure. Largely it is about when things go wrong, where Committees get into a mess. For example, do we insist on a witness appearing before a Committee? How do we handle a witness who is being intimidated by their employer?

More often than not that is a matter of judgment, based on experience, or entirely. Obviously, there was a big fuss on the Floor of the House about the European arrest warrant. What went on behind that was four Committees, staff and Members working really well to uphold the standards of scrutiny. I took no decision on that; I just made absolutely plain to the Clerks of those Committees that I really admired what they were doing. So yes, the bulk of my time is probably spent dealing with resource and personnel issues.

In the three years I have been in the job, we have driven through two major change programmes. One was a lean process review, which led on to the savings programme, which we initiated and has been very successful. The second was to co-locate the Library staff and the Committee Office staff in a new building. That was a hugely risky, difficult thing, which was partly judgment and partly leap of faith. I am not saying that I did those on my own. Obviously I played a small part with other people. Those are really big strategic decisions that I have been involved in in the past three years.

Q646 Jacob Rees-Mogg: So the idea that Clerks are not managers is essentially false. You and other Clerks will have had lots of experience of management.

Andrew Kennon: I joined in the same sort of generalist thing as other people who went into the civil service and the law, because I was a lawyer originally. When I see what my contemporaries are doing in other organisations, they are doing the same sort of thing. It is a mixture of professional knowledge, knowledge of your organisation and your ability to manage resources. No one has got promoted to a senior post in the House service in recent years who cannot do those things. Those who have specialised only in procedure and are not willing to take on management have fallen by the wayside.

Q647 Jacob Rees-Mogg: You asked the Committee to consider how Clerks could get the same expertise as their civil service colleagues. How do you think that the career of Clerks should be directed to enable them to acquire all the skills and expertise that is needed?

Andrew Kennon: For quite a long time I have been telling people in their late 30s who have been promoted to the SCS1 level that if they have been here for 10 or 15 years and done a good job, that is the time they ought to go out and do something else and then come back, because they will obviously not be up for promotion for some years. For the individual there is always the concern, “Am I going to get out of touch?” or, “Am I going to miss out on good opportunities?” I had an example a year and a half ago, when someone had the opportunity of a secondment to the Bank of England. At that time, in his particular category of staff, we could not really spare him, but it seemed such a good opportunity that I insisted

to my colleagues that we let him go, and he has come back and he has learnt lots of things from the outside.

What I would like to do more is get people into management jobs outside. The difficulty about going to the Cabinet Office, as I did, or the Foreign Office, as many other Clerks did, is that essentially you are in an advisory role; you are not managing large numbers of staff. Possibly, if we are prepared to pay for it, we could offer people to the third sector to get experience of that. I think I am right in saying that 21 Clerks have done secondments out and half of the top 12 have been seconded out.

Q648 Jacob Rees-Mogg: Dr Crewe, thank you very much for your evidence. I am pleased to hear that somebody thinks we are getting a few things right. It is somewhat reassuring after some of the other evidence we have had. In your written evidence, you said that Members might consider how they could improve morale among officials. Could you expand on what you meant by that and how we might do that?

Dr Crewe: Part of it is recognising excellence where it is. I can give an example that relates to your last question about management skill. A few of the questions have given the impression that management is about setting targets and then bullying people to meet them. I think that is a very old-fashioned, corporate style of management. The latest good practice in business is far more sophisticated than that. I saw a good example of this last year in Parliament. Again, it has been a bit quiet—it has not been publicly recognised much—but it was a cross-departmental initiative that was about getting middle-ranking officials in Parliament to get feedback from MPs about services. The feedback was not particularly negative. Different MPs had different ideas, and that is the complexity about working for MPs.

You have 650 people who want something completely different from their Parliament, but the skill with which John Benger, who was a Clerk and is now head of service delivery, managed people—some people he did not know and some people he did—from across the House to run that sort of complex review system was very inspiring. He did it not by bullying people, but by teaching, mentoring and inspiring them to do a really good job. As soon as they got any complaints from any MPs, they were on the case and responded within 24 hours if they could. One of the important findings they came up with was that constituency staff feel neglected, and so within some months they ran six regional events for constituency staff.

To some extent I think there is some very good management practice. I am not saying it is universal, but appreciation of what is already going on that is good is very important, and recognition of the complexity of Parliament would be useful, because there is a lot that officials cannot say publicly. They cannot be rude about MPs. They cannot talk about the inevitable conflicts that go on within organisations. They cannot take credit for things, because they are always giving credit to MPs. They cannot explain the delays that happen, which I know happen particularly between the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Also, when MPs get involved, they cannot blame the MPs for those delays; they have to take the blame themselves. So I think some recognition of all that would be helpful for morale.

Q649 Valerie Vaz: Mr Kennon, you said that you were making inroads into developing staff and secondments—what budget do you need to be able to do that? Or is there a nil cost if you are going to other Government Departments?

Andrew Kennon: We have quite a lot of seconding in and out, both ways. We are encouraging that and it is expanding. It costs a bit of money, but not a lot. I was actually saying that, were we to go for something where we really wanted people to take on management responsibilities elsewhere, where we were offering them as a free good to a charity or something, you are talking about their salary and the back-fill salary. If you are talking about someone at A2, you are talking about two lots of a bit more than £50,000 a year.

Q650 Chair: Do you think that if we want to see that happen we ought to make a recommendation for some budget?

Andrew Kennon: That would be helpful, but as you saw with the people you were interviewing earlier, we are an organisation that also takes in people from outside a lot. We will always be that. We are never going to necessarily develop our own best engineer, cook or accountant, so there is always scope for to and fro, and I hope that we remain as open as that.

Q651 Chair: Emma, you said that splitting the top job into two posts—CEO and Clerk—would be a recipe for disaster, but what if one of the posts was senior to the other and there was a very clear delineation of duties?

Dr Crewe: I think that that could work. I think that it would work if you still had one top boss. Having two bosses, the problem would be created, possibly not primarily for those two people—they could make it work—but for everyone else, including MPs. From the point of view of MPs and everyone else working in Parliament—I noticed that both the Management Board and the union were very against the idea of getting away from a unitary structure—it is really important to have that one boss. However, if we assume that the person at the top must have a really in-depth experience through practice—not just some knowledge—of parliamentary business in its broad sense, which I am in favour of, then I can see that it might make sense to take some of the burden off them, the parts that are a much more day-to-day, operational question of whether things are happening in time. I know that, for example, there are huge pressures to get building work done during recesses and things like that. So yes, I don't see why not. I have read that quite a lot of people seem to be in favour of having a sort of chief operational officer, or perhaps two posts.

Q652 Chair: Thank you. What do you think about that point, Andrew?

Andrew Kennon: Having seen the huge burden that has been borne by the last four Clerks of the House—I worked quite closely with some of them—I think that I have now come around to the view that the ability to delegate, particularly the corporate responsibilities, to a chief operating officer would now make sense. It is too big a burden.

One of the slight difficulties here is the tendency for everyone to go to the very top; some of the previous Clerks of the House have not necessarily discouraged that. If you have a world in which every single problem goes straight to the top, that adds to the burden quite a lot. A greater degree of delegation all the way down would help.

Q653 Chair: David, what do you think about the split and how it should work, if there is one?

David Vere: I certainly share the view that a split with two individuals parallel to each other is a recipe for disaster. There must be one senior individual within the structure. To me, it ultimately depends on how critical it is for the person at the top to have that deep understanding of the procedure and practice of the House. In principle, one could have a chief executive who is able to delegate those responsibilities to an individual who is responsible for that area of that department. It brings to mind my view of what would happen in an organisation that has a chief legal adviser—they are individuals who can provide independent advice to the chief executive. It is a fine judgment as to which of the two should be *primus inter pares*. The other question is whether we will be able to identify individuals with the capability to do the job, depending which one we choose.

Chair: That is very true.

Q654 Mr Heath: Can I come back to an issue that has come up several times in the evidence we have had: the slowness—or the slowness, according to some—of the decision-making process in the House, and the fact that it sometimes has a multiplicity of layers, which sometimes appear, from the evidence we have had, to be dysfunctional, at least in part? Is that a fair criticism? Is that something that you, Dr Crewe, have observed, and that the others of you have experienced?

Andrew Kennon: My experience with the things I have wanted to do is that that is not the case—you can get things done. The problem with our system is that it presents so many opportunities for anyone who doesn't want something to happen to obstruct it, and how shrewd people are in moving their way around. When I was secretary to the House of Commons Commission in the last Parliament, and I was explaining my job, I put up a chart of Plymouth harbour and said, "My main job is to advise people of the different routes to get through to whichever port they want to go to."

I do think the Management Board and Commission operating as two virtually separate things—not even reading each other's minutes—is a real problem, and I would really like us to have a single unitary Management Board with three or four members, a couple of senior officials and a couple of externals, and then for it to take responsibility and to be accountable for decisions that are taken.

Q655 Mr Heath: Would you agree with that, Mr Vere?

David Vere: Yes, I think there would be a lot of advantage in a unitary approach. Certainly from my experience, there is a lack of clarity on who is responsible for what, and

the relationships between the two—the Management Board and the Commission—are certainly not clear to me, but that is based on relatively limited experience. I have had no contact with the Commission and a couple of meetings with the Management Board.

Q656 Mr Heath: That also seems to be par for the course from the evidence we have been given.

David Vere: Actually, hearing the previous witnesses, I thought I was doing quite well, with two meetings in six months.

Q657 Mr Heath: I think you are well ahead of the game. Dr Crewe, do you have anything to add?

Dr Crewe: Just that some of the delays which occur when the House of Lords and the House of Commons are trying to do some things together are inevitable. But, within the House of Commons, yes, I agree. In terms of governance, I am a believer in the idea that the executive should have more clout. Whether that means that the Commission should do less micro-management or that the executives should be on the Commission, for example, I am not too sure. But I certainly think that, at the moment, there should be more delegation downwards, including from the Commission down to officials.

Q658 Mr Heath: That is helpful. Thank you. You have also given me the perfect cue to go on to the last topic for today, which has, again, been referred to many times: whether there is scope for more shared services between the two Houses, whether support services or more direct services. Dr Crewe, you have looked at both Houses, do you think we ought to be doing more together?

Dr Crewe: I agree with David Beamish's evidence on that. I would proceed with extreme caution. Having studied both Houses, I think the value of some separation and independence—even a little antagonism—is really important. We need the House of Lords to stand up to the House of Commons. Even catering, funnily enough—

Q659 Mr Heath: We need the Lords to stand up on the issue of catering and to retain their roly-poly?

Dr Crewe: No, this is a separate point. Even in catering, you could argue, it is useful if there is some separation, in the sense that if you have a closer culture between the two places, and if you encourage people to spend a huge amount of time together, I am not sure that is necessarily a good thing. There are inevitable links through parties, but I think a little aloofness is not necessarily a bad thing.

Mr Heath: I now understand the point. I thought you meant they had to defend—

Dr Crewe: But obviously the shared digital thing sounds eminently sensible.

Andrew Kennon: I am wholly in favour. Part of my experience is as a senior responsible owner for what I call an IT-enabled change project covering both Houses. There are lots of advantages in working closely together and my experience of working with my opposite numbers in the Lords on Joint Committees is great.

The one thing I would say is that I would be hesitant about creating separate joint departments. I think it is much better that, for example, the Lords run the procurement operation for both of us, and that one or other is directly managing it properly and providing a service to the other rather than creating new departments—

Q660 Mr Heath: But we are separate customers, so the specifications may be different but the provider is one.

Andrew Kennon indicated assent.

David Vere: Following on from that, the risk is that otherwise you end up creating a third entity which I think would be an even worse world than now. I see an inevitability in gradually sharing more and more of the services we need to run the place. I think that will happen as a matter of course just to make sure it is governed in an appropriate way.

Mr Heath: And with appropriate green colouring at one end and red at the other. Thank you very much.

Chair: Can I thank all three of you for coming today and giving evidence to us? It has been extremely helpful. Between you, you have many years of looking at the House and its workings. Whether you have recently joined us or, like you, Andrew, have been here for a considerable length of time, we are very grateful indeed for your expertise and knowledge today. Thank you very much.