



House of Commons Governance Committee

Oral evidence: House of Commons Governance, HC 692

Wednesday 3 December 2014

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Sir Robert Rogers KCB](#)

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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

Questions 734-769

Witnesses: **Sir Robert Rogers KCB**, former Clerk of the House and Chief Executive, gave evidence.

Q734 Chair: Sir Robert, welcome to this session. May I say that we are all aware that your imminent elevation to the House of Lords has been announced? Congratulations. We are also aware that, until it has actually happened, the correct form of address is Sir Robert.

Sir Robert Rogers: Quite correct.

Q735 Chair: Let me begin by asking what you think are the most important attributes for the person who at an official level leads the House and the House Service?

Sir Robert Rogers: Leadership, communication, profound understanding of Parliament and its needs. If I could say, by way of apostrophe, it is extremely important not to think of the House of Commons as an organisation. It is an organism. Organisms are reactive, unpredictable, often cussed, and the House and its support cannot be treated in the mechanistic way that you would perhaps treat an organisation. At the same time, I think you have got to be diplomatic. You have, as I suggested in my paper, 650 Member-proprietors of small businesses. All Members do their work in a different way, which contributes to the strength of the institution, so you have to be able to cope with that. You have certainly got to be accessible. You do not have to go just the extra mile, but the extra 10 miles sometimes, because of the unpredictability of this place and of the matters with which it deals.

Q736 Chair: On this organism/organisation, is not the truth of it that it is both, and in order to be an active and lively and healthy organism, it does require structure and organisation?

Sir Robert Rogers: Absolutely. Yes, of course. It is an organisational framework that supports a challenging and demanding organism.

Q737 Chair: You did this diary dip—for which many thanks—and you have talked about the fact that about a quarter of your time was spent on issues that combined the role of Chief Executive and Clerk. Could you give us examples?

Sir Robert Rogers: I should say first of all that that was a pretty impressionistic exercise. When I described things as being part of both, it was because I really could not separate in any meaningful way different functions. In a sense, I could almost say that 100% fell into that category. A Member would come and see me about something, perhaps inquiring whether he or she had a case of a breach of privilege, and then would segue without pause into an administrative matter that was troubling them. More broadly, although, for example, security may appear to be a purely organisational issue, as we all know, it actually affects the way that Members do their job. Reaching that delicate balance between protecting a picture-postcard terrorist target and allowing citizens access to their Parliament is an organisational challenge, but it is very clearly a parliamentary challenge for which you have to have some pretty sensitive antennae.

Q738 Valerie Vaz: I still have this picture in my head about this organism. I am wondering whether I am an amoeba or a paramecium. We are usually poked by democracy—our constituents—and I suppose that is where the cussedness comes into it. We have to respond to those who voted us in here.

Following on from what the Chair asked about your different roles, you intervene in certain areas when Members ask you to or when the organism/organisation asks you to. For example, why did pay end up in the High Court?

Sir Robert Rogers: Let me say first of all that I celebrate cussedness. It is what this place is about, and the more cussed it is, in some ways, the better it is. On the pay, I really do not think it is proper for me, in public, to go into the negotiations and the positions that were taken up. It was a very long-running issue, as you know, and it was a decision that was taken before I became Clerk of the House.

Q739 Valerie Vaz: Right. So there is intervention on certain areas and not on others. How do you choose which ones to intervene on? Obviously people want to go to the top of the organisation to make things work. How would you intervene on those? Would you talk to the Speaker about them or would you just get on and do it?

Sir Robert Rogers: I do not think it is right to see it in terms of intervention. You are looking, so to speak, at the dashboard of everything that is going on, but every now and again something goes amiss, and I think it is reasonable for Members to expect to be able to go to

the top. I use the phrase “where the buck stops” in my paper, and I think that that is a very important element in the combination of the two roles. For example, mice, We have all suffered from mice, as we have all suffered from moths. It is part of being in what is really a failing building.

Chair: Only in the fabric; not in the activity.

Sir Robert Rogers: Certainly not, no; the activity is more self-confident and energetic than I have ever known it, as I said in my retirement letter.

A Member was extremely upset about the mice. You can fob people off with explanations, but you must show that the organisation is responsive and that it matters. On that particular occasion, the issue was raised in the morning and by 2.30 pm I had convened a meeting with the director general of facilities, the director of accommodation and logistics, our outside pest control people and the Member concerned. That was perhaps heavy artillery for the particular mouse problem that that individual Member had encountered. It did not help that her staff were actually feeding the mice, which was rather blunting our pest control efforts. Nevertheless, being able to do that is an essential part of running a responsive organisation.

I was very concerned to hear some of the points that you raised with John Borley; in those particular cases, our delivery has not been good enough. There may be reasons, and sometimes the business of tackling that and getting understanding is explaining the reasons in a compelling way, but you must have that feeling of reaction and energy; if you don't, you are an underperforming organisation.

Q740 Valerie Vaz: Thank you for that, but I raised the issue of pay, which was obviously in the public domain because it was in the High Court, and I know that you weren't there at that time. People like to trivialise Parliament by bringing up the mouse issue or the price of cups of tea; I was talking about more serious things, although that was serious for that Member. I am talking about the combination of what you do for Members and what you do for staff, for the staff management, and the interventions on that level. You chose to do it by bringing everyone together, but in other instances you would intervene yourself. Is it your management structure that is wrong by having everyone coming together in that way?

Sir Robert Rogers: No, I don't think that it indicates an underlying failure of management. In any organisation you will get left-field issues; you will get the crisis of the day that has to be dealt with. Sometimes it is just that someone drops the ball and you have to deal with it quickly. You need to stand well back from any organisation to see whether you have episodic failings that have to be dealt with in the way that I have described. I am not trivialising things, in the sense that there were big issues there, because there were media and reputational issues, as well as the comfort and service being provided to the individual Member. It was not quite as miniature as perhaps I might have given the impression. You need to handle it in a different way when you identify systemic failings. Where there are systemic failings, you have to take management or, indeed, structural action on a rather higher level in order to deal with them.

Q741 Valerie Vaz: You chose that particular example, but perhaps there are others.

Sir Robert Rogers: Visitors is another—I can give you quite a few.

Q742 Valerie Vaz: Let's move on to the management side. You rose to the top of your profession and became chief Clerk. How did you get there in terms of experience and getting your management experience? Do you feel that staff in other areas of the House could also rise to the level of chief Clerk?

Sir Robert Rogers: Absolutely. I would preface my answer by saying that I enormously enjoyed the Chief Executive aspects—I am deliberately putting that quite vaguely, because I think that most of it is like that between the roles of Clerk and Chief Executive. I enormously enjoyed those aspects. I found it extremely exhilarating and endlessly fascinating to be responsible for running an organisation.

In terms of my own experience, there is a paragraph in my paper that outlines some of the things that I did outside the House. I found that all of those had directly applicable lessons for the role that I played as Chief Executive. I stopped those outside things; they didn't go on beyond the time that I was appointed Clerk Assistant. But as Clerk Assistant, I was running a department of 550 people with a budget of £70 million. That was—if you call it an apprenticeship—actually a very effective apprenticeship. Doing that job, I was able to put into practice a lot of the things that I had learnt.

Of course, over the years and increasingly recently, there has been individual training on financial management, risk, HR issues, FOI and diversity. There is a lot. A lot more can be done. You have heard from David Vere about learning and development. That is a post which I specifically wanted to recruit to, because I felt that we needed to raise our game on learning and development. David has gripped that extremely effectively, as was clear to you yesterday.

Q743 Jacob Rees-Mogg: Thank you, Sir Robert, for coming to see us. You are wearing a visitor's pass, which must be the first time in many years that you have had to wear one of those. I don't imagine that there was security the last time you came in and needed a visitor's pass.

Sir Robert Rogers: No, there wasn't. It was an effective sort of security because, with a very static security force, faces were known. You cannot do that in the modern world.

Q744 Jacob Rees-Mogg: In your submission to the Committee, you support the appointment of a Chief Operating Officer. I wonder if you could summarise the advantages of that approach and give an idea of how the responsibilities of the combined post that you held have changed since Tebbit recommended that they should not be split.

Sir Robert Rogers: Taking the Chief Operating Officer—some of your evidence has talked about a deputy corporate officer. That is not a phrase I would use, because corporate officers have a very clear set of responsibilities, not least under the Corporate Manslaughter

and Corporate Homicide Act, which will be only too familiar to the Chair of the Committee. I think the Bill went back and forth between the two Houses seven times.

Chair: Another piece of fine legislation which I introduced.

Sir Robert Rogers: But those responsibilities for the safety of people on the premises, for owning property, entering into contracts, leases and things of that sort—they are legal responsibilities. They cannot be delegated, so the idea of a deputy corporate officer, which I appreciate was not the question you asked, is not an appropriate title.

The Chief Operating Officer, on the other hand, could bring a great deal to the governance. I have suggested that it need not be someone brought in afresh from outside. Clearly, in a time of austerity, appointing an additional official at a high salary is not a particularly attractive route to go down. I think that it would be perfectly possible for a member of the existing Management Board to take on that responsibility. But I see the role as twofold. First of all, taking a lot of pressure off the Clerk. You would need to have an incredibly close working relationship. I think you would need a daily prayers for 15 minutes or so while you decide the priorities of the day and, indeed, the week, month and year as you bring them up to date.

The particular role that I would see as being extraordinarily valuable is the supra-departmental role. The Chief Operating Officer would take particular responsibility for delivery, value for money, environmental performance, risk—these things which the Clerk, I can assure you, takes an extremely close interest in. As an accounting officer, there is of course a formal responsibility in respect of VFM. I am not suggesting that that would be diluted, but in terms of being able to devote time to it, I think that it would be an invaluable additional asset.

Q745 Jacob Rees-Mogg: What changes have there been in your role, or the role that you had until recently, since Tebbit?

Sir Robert Rogers: I think the principal one is moving from a federal structure to an integrated House Service. As I told you in my memorandum, my predecessor was actually head of the Department of Chamber and Committee Services. I entirely understand and respect the decision that he took to do that. By the time that I became Clerk, I felt that the organisation had moved on. I felt that it was vital that every department and part of the House Service saw the Clerk as not beholden to one set of interests. Indeed, in everything that I have said—in messages to the House Service, in talks to senior leaders and in talks to all-staff meetings—I have emphasised the shared role that everybody who works for the House of Commons has in supporting the parliamentary process. It is not the preserve of any one area of the House Service, and that is a really important message to get home—I hesitate to say “We’re all in this together”—

Chair: You are right to hesitate.

Sir Robert Rogers: I overcame my hesitation. But it is true, and it is a really important element of the worth that people see in their jobs, and so the morale that they have in doing that vital and, actually, unique function.

Jacob Rees-Mogg: Thank you. With the prescience that we have come to expect from you, you have answered my next question as well.

Q746 Sir Oliver Heald: The staff, or at least some of them, have given us the impression that if you are not in the Department of Chamber and Committee Services, you would struggle ever to obtain the job that you recently vacated. Do you feel that that is true: that there is no real way through to the very top for staff in some parts of the other departments?

Sir Robert Rogers: It may appear so at the moment, but I think it is changing. Andrew Kennon gave you evidence about the permeability at SCS1 and A2 at the moment, and we have got a great many people who—

Q747 Chair: I know what they are, but could you explain what you are talking about?

Sir Robert Rogers: Forgive me. SCS1 was an assistant secretary in old money.

Chair: Grade 5.

Sir Robert Rogers: Grade 5, and typically it is the sort of rank where somebody is Clerk of a select committee. A2 is probably second Clerk of a select committee or number two or three in a procedural office—that sort of level. There is now a greater catholicity of background of people who are undertaking those roles, but there is still a way to go. One of the important things about a single House Service which I think would be terminally threatened by having two sources of authority, Clerk and Chief Executive, is that if you have a single House Service, you can make much more effective efforts at mobility within the service.

Q748 Sir Oliver Heald: But how realistic is it really to think of someone from one of the other departments ever ending up as the Chief Executive?

Sir Robert Rogers: Just to take one good example—I do not want to personalise this too much—the Clerk of private Members' Bills spent quite a long time in the parliamentary estates directorate at the start of her career and for some years afterwards. That is an extremely able individual at SCS1 who I would hope has, like many others, the ability to rise to the top of the organisation. So when you look at what people have done, I think you will find that there is an ever-increasing variety.

In a sense, I rather flinch from the description of Clerk, because there is this Brahminical implication, whereas when you look at the people who are doing the jobs, you will see a much greater variety than ever before, and it is a variety that I would very much want to see supported and extended.

Q749 Sir Oliver Heald: When we had the Management Board members in, they said that they thought that they were better at short-term rather than long-term issues and that sometimes quick decisions were made on long-term issues when perhaps more reflection was needed and that those were not always seen through. In your paper at paragraph 5, you set out a huge range of achievements during your time, so there is obviously some good thought going on, but do you recognise what they were saying? What do you think they were they on about?

Sir Robert Rogers: I know exactly, because it is a conversation that I shared with them over the time that I was Clerk of the House. It is partly down to the governance structure that you can think great thoughts about strategy in the Management Board, but if you do not have the Commission completely on board, it can be quite academic. That experience was one of the things that underlay my recommendation to you that there should be a Commission which combined executive and non-executive members. That sort of body is very much better equipped to develop strategy and see it through, rather than the propose/dispose relationship between the Management Board and a Commission that, with the best will in the world, is not that interested in long-term strategy. We used to sweat away producing a wonderful strategy and the Commission would say, “Oh yes, fine.” It is jolly good that they said it was fine and not, “What rubbish!”, but you actually need the continuing involvement and a really quite intimate understanding of what is involved in achieving the strategy. The best way of doing that is with the sort of hybrid board that I believe the Commission should become.

Chair: That leads very neatly into questions from Mr Heath and Mr Norman.

Q750 Mr Heath: Indeed it does. I would like to explore the apparent dysfunctionality between the Commission and the Management Board. Barbara Scott said that there was complete mismatch between the Commission and the Management Board. It sounds as though you agree with that view.

Sir Robert Rogers: Yes.

Q751 Mr Heath: Right. At the moment, is that because there is a lack of communication because of a failure to have common agendas, or is it more structural, in terms of having, as you have just described, more interchangeable membership?

Sir Robert Rogers: I think it is cultural and structural. In 2010 and 2011, we had a couple of joint meetings between the Commission and the Management Board. We sat higgledy-piggledy around the table; it was not a sort of North Korea-South Korea engagement. That was extremely good, and people talked frankly and informally. Those did not continue, for reasons that I can only guess at.

Q752 Mr Heath: Right. Let us all have our guesses in due course. If you had more than the simple presence of the Clerk on the Commission—in fact, you had a more integrated person—would that provide the strategic certainty that the House needs?

Sir Robert Rogers: Strategic certainty is always going to be a challenge. Because a revamped Commission of the sort that I have suggested would still be subject to the wishes of the House, there will always be an element of uncertainty. Of course, there is an element of uncertainty in developing and delivering strategy in any type of organisation. The great advantage would be that all members of such a body would be steeped in the common purpose and have the understanding of the organisation—and its pressures, aspirations, abilities, strengths and weaknesses—that is necessary to be realistic about developing and achieving a strategy.

Q753 Mr Heath: There is a further level, potentially, of disconnect. Several members of staff expressed to us that they did not feel connected to the Management Board. There were complaints that members of staff would be asked to produce a paper and then would not present it to the Management Board; they were not able to speak to and around the very paper that they had produced. Do you recognise that disconnect?

Sir Robert Rogers: Yes, I read that evidence. Sometimes that was the case. I have always been a great believer in taking along with you the people who are hands-on. It is good for them and it is good to expose them to the body that you are appearing in front of. If that happened, it was not ideal.

Q754 Mr Heath: Right. But it is not a basic structural problem.

Sir Robert Rogers: No, no, you just say, “Fred, come along to the Management Board with me.” The Management Board would not have said, “I’m sorry, but we’re not going to see Fred because we’re not interested.”

Q755 Jesse Norman: Sir Robert, in other evidence we have heard a lot about different models that could be used—analogs across other public services and companies. In some evidence, we have heard of the importance of looking at management structures in the NHS, law firms or the NAO and places like that. It seems to me that many of these differ from the House of Commons in a very fundamental way. You have empowered, democratically enabled Members of the House of Commons who are often, as you have said, cussed and grumpy clients who do not hesitate to interrupt at any moment, and there simply is no parallel in these other organisations. Is that right, and does that limit the extent to which those organisations are useful in thinking about the way in which the House of Commons ought to be managed?

Sir Robert Rogers: I don’t think I said that Members were cussed and grumpy; I think I said that the organism could be cussed and grumpy.

Mr Heath: I ask the Committee to opine on that.

Sir Robert Rogers: I think you have to be selective. You look at other organisations and you look at, for example, how they operate partnerships, which Dame Janet Gaymer talked to you about. You look at how they bring together the administrative and the professional. You can learn lessons and you can have good ideas, but you have to be very discriminating about the ideas that you take from them, because you have to map them on an organisation that is completely unique—sorry, there are no degrees about uniqueness; I do beg your pardon.

Chair: No adverbs with “unique”, please.

Sir Robert Rogers: Which is unique in every way.

In the early part of the paper that I submitted to you, I produced a list of what I thought were the particular characteristics of the institution of the House of Commons and the challenges that come thereby to running it. I thought that one of the most compelling pieces of oral evidence given to you was from Lord Browne of Madingley, who said you must identify the primary purpose of an organisation, and the person who runs it has got to embody that primary purpose. I thought that that was an extremely good and indeed passportable principle to the management of the House of Commons.

Q756 Jesse Norman: We have certainly had a lot of evidence that the primary purpose of this institution is the parliamentary one. Can I move on from that thought? In your paper, you are frank about the successes and failures to some extent of the Management Board, but you are also extremely critical of the Commission. You have described it as trapped in the legislative amber of the 1970s and short-termist. You pointed out that it is in effect an executive body composed of non-executive members.

Sir Robert Rogers: Yes.

Q757 Jesse Norman: Obviously, different models have been proposed to us for how the Commission could be reconstituted. Could you talk a little bit about the strength of the model that you are proposing? One aspect that is certainly striking is that the Speaker might not himself or herself be a member of the Commission as so constituted.

Sir Robert Rogers: I think it is a model that, in this case, probably you can import with reasonable confidence, because it is the norm of modern governance in the public and private sectors—the mix of executive and non-executive. Here we have got a particular characteristic of the non-executive. There is the internal non-executive—the Member community, as it were—and there is the external non-executive. As I said in my paper, I hugely value the sort of challenge and different perspective that outside non-executives can bring. I think the primary merit of that—shall we call it the mixed model?—is that you have your outside non-execs and you have Members with particular roles.

I agree entirely with Sir Alan Haselhurst’s evidence that the Chair of Admin should be a member of the Commission. Clearly, the Chair of the Finance Committee, as I think it will be renamed, should be. You also have to recognise that it is a time-consuming process.

Lord Browne talked to you about having non-execs four or five days a month, if they were going to be completely involved in the business. That is four or five full days in a month. For Members of Parliament, who are pulled every which way by their parliamentary duties and their political priorities, that is a very considerable commitment of time, so I think that that is something else that needs to be put into the mix.

Q758 Jesse Norman: Another concern expressed to us has to do with the way in which the Deputy Speakers are to be involved in this process or given scope to show their value. Do you have views on how that should happen, if at all?

Sir Robert Rogers: I think one of the strengths of the Chair team in the House of Commons is that it's relatively small. On the continent, it is perfectly normal to have a dozen vice-presidents, so you don't get the esprit de corps that you should get among those who have the very heavy burden of chairing proceedings. I have the greatest respect for the current team of Deputies. The previous team, who were the longest-serving team of Deputies ever, were similarly capable and committed. I think that when you have people like that in those roles, you should look very carefully at how you can use their skills, experience and authority more effectively.

Q759 Chair: Sir Robert, before we hear from Mr Paisley, I just want to ask you this about board reviews. Following the Higgs report, private companies, quoted companies, effectively have to conduct reviews of how their board operates. That includes anonymised interviews with each board member about how the others, especially the chief executive and the chair of the board, are operating. Have board reviews ever been conducted here either at Management Board level or at Commission level?

Sir Robert Rogers: Not at Commission level. For the Management Board, I brought in the NAO to do a board effectiveness review, and we came out of it with some considerable credit. We have done a similar exercise—I say “we”; this was in my former role—and it is something that needs to be refreshed constantly. I think the principle of Higgs is absolutely right, and it's a role in which the non-execs can play an important part.

Chair: Of course.

Sir Robert Rogers: You need to step outside yourself and look at the job that you're doing.

There is also the annual governance statement, which is an increasingly serious document; indeed, it has been transformed. The first one and the last one that I signed were very different documents; the last one was an infinitely more comprehensive paper. That is another indication of the health of the organisation.

There is also internal audit. I regard internal audit as a hugely important part of the armoury of a chief executive, and we are very fortunate to have an extremely effective internal audit function.

Q760 Ian Paisley: Sir Robert, do you think that the letters of delegation are a good example of the bureaucracy working, or is that just more bureaucracy?

Sir Robert Rogers: It's a way in which you indicate the resilience of the organisation. It's an audit trail. It stops things simply going down rabbit holes. Yes, of course, when you make them as comprehensive as you have to make them, they are quite unwieldy, and you may have a fair degree of confidence that the person to whom the letter of delegation is addressed would be doing their job perfectly adequately without a letter of delegation, but I think it's the sort of thing that a mature organisation has to have.

Q761 Ian Paisley: There is a feeling among some Members that there were issues to do with queuing at St Stephen's; that became a bit of a nightmare for some. The only way to get that addressed was to go right to the top of the organisation, which seems a waste of resources. You mentioned earlier that you had had to address issues to do with mice, blocked toilets and stuff like that. Yes, you can do that; you can sort the issue out, but it's heavy artillery to resolve a management issue. Is it possible to delegate those issues properly within the House and get solutions to them? Is it a culture change that's needed to get there?

Sir Robert Rogers: Normally, these things should be sorted out at operational level. It's the sort of thing that I expected my managers to be able to do. What can happen, though, is that the situation changes, and changes quite quickly. Let's take the visitor queuing issue, because it's an extremely good example. It would be possible, if you were going to be a rougho-tougho Chief Executive, to say that the problem here is all-party parliamentary groups suddenly having half a dozen or eight really attractive and interesting meetings. Each of those draws in 200 people, so suddenly you have a spike in the visitor throughput. At the same time, not known more generally, you may have credible intelligence that gives you a security problem. It may be that business as usual is not always going to be able to sort that out, and sometimes you need to escalate it.

Another factor is management bandwidth. If you have some highly capable managers on the loose, as it were, and you can suddenly say to somebody, "Go and sort that out. Take two or three people with you and get it sorted." That is great, but when you do that, if there is no fat in the organisation, you are taking management resource and effort away from another area.

Q762 Ian Paisley: But Sir Robert, do you agree about the reason why MPs like me come to you with those issues? They are not trivial but, frankly, you have better and more important things to be at. The reason we come to you is because you are visible and approachable. As the Serjeant at Arms says, the managers are grey and we do not get to see or know them. How do we address that culture and get the managers known among Members?

Sir Robert Rogers: That is an extremely good question, and it is one that I have wondered about. The Administration Committee sees a wide range of managers, including some relatively junior ones. There are all sorts of ways to go to make it clear to Members more generally about how the thing operates. We have tried having a mugshot of the person who is responsible for a building or part of a building prominently displayed with contact

details. Trombinoscopes, as the French call them, the mugshot board, are very useful, because you suddenly think, “Oh, that’s what she does.” That could be useful. There is a panoply of things—

Q763 Chair: Name badges?

Sir Robert Rogers: I would have no difficulty with name badges. Might I mischievously suggest that if the staff wear name badges, the security challenge would be made much easier if all hon. Members wore their name badges at all times.

Q764 Chair: I agree with that. The fact that you can’t do everything is not a reason for not doing anything.

Sir Robert Rogers: No, of course not. Name badges are a jolly good idea; I have no problem with them at all.

Q765 Ian Paisley: Nothing beats pressing the flesh, though. The managers should be out there in our faces.

Sir Robert Rogers: Yes.

Q766 Ian Paisley: That is where there is an absence. It is not necessarily their fault. It might just be a reluctance to approach, because some of the Members here are terrible. I wouldn’t want to approach them.

Sir Robert Rogers: It may be confidence. I think you have put something firmly on my successor’s agenda, let me put it that way.

Q767 Ian Paisley: What are the barriers to shared services between our House and the Lords?

Sir Robert Rogers: I would start by emphasising just how much is done jointly already. Estates is a key one, archives, ICT, procurement and commercial services: I think there are 23 or 24 altogether. There is a very large area of shared services as we speak.

Where you start to run into difficulties is in political acceptability, because there is no denying that the two Houses have a different parliamentary and political culture. I think you have always got a problem where we have the House service approaching 2,000 people and the House of Lords administration is about 500. Where you have that asymmetry it is a fruitful field for suspicion. I would say unjustified suspicion, but nevertheless you have to deal with the realities.

You also need to look at where it will really make a difference. You talked to Richard Tapner-Evans and he told you of the things that are done jointly, but not to the extent of a

joint catering service. It would be very difficult to get a joint catering service. I must be very careful for a number of reasons what I say here.

Ian Paisley: The champagne?

Q768 Chair: We heard a few things yesterday.

Sir Robert Rogers: No, I am not going into the quality of the champagne. People are very possessive about some services. Catering is an absolute classic. Of course, there are large areas of the specifically parliamentary services that you would not put together because the Houses disagree about things and they must have their own independent advice and support.

Chair: Ms Vaz, do you want to ask one last question?

Q769 Valerie Vaz: It is like a final question in an interview. Is there anything that you want to tell us that went wrong where you might have done things differently?

Sir Robert Rogers: How long have you got?

Valerie Vaz: Two minutes.

Sir Robert Rogers: As I said earlier, people drop the ball. Hindsight is a wonderful thing and there are quite a few things that I would have done differently. I think I would have approached the pay business a little differently, if I had had 20:20 hindsight. I hope it comes out of the paper that I was very proud of what the House Service achieved when I had the privilege of being Clerk of the House. I have every confidence that they will go on from that. They know what they can do and that is beyond price.

Chair: That is a good note on which to end. Thank you very much. Good luck with your elevation.

Sir Robert Rogers: Thank you very much.