



Communities and Local Government Committee

Oral evidence: The Government's Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, HC 369

Monday 12 October 2015

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Evidence from witnesses:

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Members present: Mr Clive Betts (Chair); Bob Blackman; Jo Cox; Helen Hayes; Julian Knight; David Mackintosh; Mr Mark Prisk; Mary Robinson; Alison Thewliss.

Witnesses: **Professor Colin Copus**, De Montfort University, **Professor Andy Pike**, Newcastle University, and **Alexandra Jones**, Chief Executive, Centre for Cities, gave evidence.

Questions 1 - 52

Q1 Chair: Good afternoon. Thank you very much for coming along and welcome, everyone, to our first evidence session in our inquiry into the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill. Before I go to the witnesses, members of the Committee will put on record any interests they may have, which are separate from our declarations of financial interests in the register but things that might be deemed to be important to consideration of this subject. I am a Vice President of the Local Government Association.

Helen Hayes: I am also, as well as being a Member of Parliament, a councillor in the London Borough of Southwark, and I employ another councillor in the London Borough of Southwark in my office.

David Mackintosh: I am a Northamptonshire county councillor.

Q2 Chair: Our interests are on the record. Again for our records, if you could just go along the row and say who you are and the organisations you represent today, that would be a good start.

Alexandra Jones: I am Alexandra Jones. I am the Chief Executive of the Centre for Cities.

Professor Pike: I am Andy Pike. I am Professor of Local and Regional Development at the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies, Newcastle University.

Professor Copus: I am Colin Copus. I am Professor of Local Politics at De Montfort University in Leicester.

Q3 Chair: You are all most welcome. Alex, I know you have been before the Committee in the past, and Colin, you advised the Committee in an inquiry in the last Parliament. Andy, I do not know whether you have been before our Committee before.

Professor Pike: I came and gave some evidence for the fiscal devolution inquiry.

Q4 Chair: That is right; of course. Just to begin with, what do you think the Government's objectives are in terms of its approach on devolution? Do you think the objectives are the right ones, and are they going the right way about achieving them?

Alexandra Jones: The original objectives have been around economic growth and then more recently around rebalancing the economy, with the discussions about the northern powerhouse and greater devolution to some of the city regions in the belt across the north. Public service reform is clearly in discussion. When you look at the Manchester devolution deal, health and social care is clearly a part of it, and many of the cities themselves have been talking more recently about public service reform and the ability within their local area to pull things together so that services are wrapped round individuals rather than being done to individuals. The Troubled Families pilots are an example where people are trying to make sure it is about individuals and families rather than different silos from Whitehall. For example, one troubled family had four different interventions from different parts of the system; instead, it is wrapping them round so there is one intervention that works for that individual or family. It certainly started with economic growth and that was the primary driver, but clearly, as you look at the deals, public service reform and rebalancing have come into it far more.

Professor Pike: There are about five at last count. There is certainly the local growth and economic development side of things. That has been connected, as Alex has said, with rebalancing the various powerhouses, in addition to the northern one. There is the public sector transformation and savings stuff. There are two others as well that perhaps do not get addressed as much. One is the idea of greater accountability—the idea that Government can be brought closer to the people and made more accountable as a result—and then perhaps the other is about decentralisation being a better way to address some of these big societal challenges around ageing, climate change and so forth through more devolved arrangements. Overall, there is a lack of clarity, in some ways. There is an overlap and a bit of confusion, perhaps, sometimes in terms of which rationales are promoted at which points. Perhaps having some greater clarity might be a bit more helpful in terms of the purpose of this, certainly given the stage that we have got to at this point, which I am sure we will come back to in the discussion.

Professor Copus: I would just add that as a series of objectives the key issue for devolution and the construction of the Bill and what the Government have been doing is really the economic agenda. It is about economic growth; it is about rebalancing the economy. In that journey, there have been a number of other objectives collected as well. Public sector reform, certainly, looking at issues like transport, health and housing, and how those particular service areas integrate across any given geographical area, is central to this particular agenda. That brings up another objective about what is the role of local government with all of this and whether there is a barely-hidden agenda, maybe, to start to think about restructuring. One of the things that concerns me the most with the devolution agenda is that the economic driver means that any reshaping of local government may only be a transitory thing, which then has to be reshaped when central Government, in 10 or 20 years' time, changes its priorities again, and whether we are seeing within the combined-authority agenda a gradual softening up of the local government community to even larger units of local government. I notice there is a worrying clause in the Bill that suggests possible restructuring somewhere along the line. Certainly the original driver was economic growth and the rebalancing of the economy.

Q5 Chair: Can I just challenge you on the last point, Colin? Combined authorities now are being looked at for a range of different parts of the country, but Manchester was the start. Manchester

developed its own way of working. The combined authority was a local government idea; it was not something that civil servants dreamed up and said, "There you are. There is a model. Go on and have it." Is that not slightly different to trying to force local authorities into wider and wider regional type approaches? This is a local authority collective action—a voluntary coming together.

Professor Copus: Manchester is very specific, in that there is a longstanding, very high quality political leadership in Manchester. Where we are in Manchester is not simply a result of the current devolution agenda; there has been a lot of groundwork done that has enabled it to capitalise on where the Government is at the moment. Certainly that did grow from the bottom up. The worry I am beginning to develop is that in other areas that were not so far down that route and that maybe are responding somewhat quicker than might be decent in some cases, given the narrow period of time to put some of the bids together, we may find at some point somebody raises the question, "Well, if we now are operating along the lines of combined authorities, why do we need all of these constituent councils?" That to me just rings alarm bells.

Q6 Chair: Any concerns?

Alexandra Jones: In our view, combined authorities are a very effective local-government-driven idea for working on economic growth. I have not seen suggestions that they would be appropriate for public services at all levels, for example. If you look at London, you have the Mayor of London and you have the GLA, but you also have London boroughs. While there are plenty of debates to be had about what is most or least effective, you still have different levels for operating on different issues. I understand where Colin is coming from. It is not a concern that I have, because I have not seen that desire to abolish everything underneath. What I see coming out from local government is a desire to do certain things at certain levels. If you look at transport, it makes most sense to do it in the area in which people live and work. It would not make any sense to do transport just within the central council of Manchester or in the City of London; you need to do that across a wider travel-to-work area. In the same way, it makes more sense to do strategic planning across a wider area. If you are looking at public service delivery, there are certain frameworks that might make a lot of sense at that city-region level, but I have not seen that desire to merge all of the different things that local authorities do at the combined-authority level. It is different things at different levels. I think that is right.

Q7 Julian Knight: I want to expand on Professor Copus's point. I wondered whether or not you could comment. We are often told that this is a bottom-up process, and Manchester, the poster boy of this whole development, has been, we would all recognise, a bottom-up process. Do you think the requirement for certain areas—large conurbations, for example—to have an elected mayor as a prerequisite for devolution means this is now becoming a little bit more of a top-down approach than meets the eye?

Professor Copus: It is an interesting question. These larger areas are areas that will not be directly elected. The preferred model for some combined authorities, if the authorities themselves had their way, would be that a number of council leaders, meeting in private in a secret meeting somewhere, much like happens in local government, would decide who would be the leader of the combined authority. If you look at Manchester, you had the prospect there of 10 council leaders, meeting secretly, deciding on who would be the leader—indeed, they have decided who is going to be the interim mayor—to the total exclusion of 1.8 million voters across those 10 areas. You cannot say that 10 people meeting in a room is more democratic than an open vote. It may be in North Korea, but certainly not in English local government, I would argue. That then comes round to whether deals can be struck where the local authorities concerned are willing to accept an elected mayor. There is a difference with getting a deal that makes it worthwhile. There comes a tipping point: are we going to accept this model of government that broadly local authorities and councillors in particular do not like? What will we need to be able to agree to that? If that tipping point is found and it is agreed, then it is a negotiation; it is not necessarily top-down and imposed. If central Government insists on that as the model before any discussions are undertaken, then it becomes a somewhat more top-down process. The question is: where is the accountability for these organisations that are not traditional local authorities?

Q8 Julian Knight: Do any of the witnesses see that there is any other accountability apart from an elected-mayor model?

Professor Copus: If you want me to answer personally, I think an elected mayor is the right model of government for a combined authority, yes.

Q9 Chair: We are going to come back to the mayor question again in a little bit. Just finally from me before I go on to Mark, what do you

think success for the devolution approach will look like, if it is to be successful? What do you think the Government ought to be achieving out of this in five or 10 years? How can we set up a proper monitoring system to test whether the objectives have been met?

Alexandra Jones: My view is that success would look like the city regions and the counties, where that is appropriate, that are gaining greater devolution being able to deliver public services that are of high standard and to deliver stronger economic growth—so, they are able to spend some of the money that they get in ways that deliver better outcomes for that local area. That would look like transport systems that work better, that are more integrated and where you have the ability to get buses, to get trains and to have roads that are more effective within a particular city region; having more of the right kinds of houses built within that area, in areas where there is demand for those houses; and being able to agree what the outcomes are within a city region and then be held to account for them by MPs—by Parliament—to make sure those outcomes are delivered. What I would like to see is the mayors of the city regions, for example—the metro mayors—being hauled up before you to be held to account for delivering on some of the outcomes that have been agreed.

Professor Pike: It is very important that we see decentralisation as a means to an end; it is not an end in itself. The important thing is to try to be clearer in terms of the purpose, the direction, the timescale and the vision, if you like, of what decentralisation is going to be for. What question is it answering? That is a very important thing to get back to. At the minute, certainly since 2010, there has been historically an oscillation—a pendulum that has swung from regional structures to local structures, back to regional structures, back to local structures. Even now, it is moving towards sub-regional, city-regional, combined-authority type structures. The issue is: are these any better as forms of decentralised governance for doing the sorts of economic, social and environmental things that we want to be able to do, and at the geographical scales—the levels—that we want? It is very important to get that sense of the purpose and the direction of what it is all about.

We have been trying to address exactly this question. There is a real gap in terms of monitoring, assessment and evaluation. We do not know very much about the difference that decentralisation can make or not; when it works well and when it does not work well—some of the key things in terms of understanding the different inputs in terms of decentralisation. What are the activities, the outputs and the outcomes? If fundamentally the impact we want is enhanced prosperity in our cities and regions, how can we design decentralisation

to work in such a fashion? I do not mean as a top-down, centralised Whitehall blueprint, but trying to find a way of reconciling what we have at the moment, which is—in England, anyway—a very ad hoc, piecemeal process that is unfolding, often very rapidly in the last couple of weeks or so, which is risking returning to something that the Audit Commission in the late 1980s described as “a patchwork quilt of complexity and idiosyncrasy”. Here we are in 2015 with something that looks very similar.

Professor Copus: Devolution is held up to be an end in itself, and that is often part of the problem. There have to be some real outcomes from the process. Improved public services is one of the key outcomes. Accountability in high-profile public leadership is something else. We have a system and a culture that are very detached from politics, particularly local politics, and if devolution engages people more in that process, that is ultimately to the good. Certainly greater discretion for localities to shape their own economies, to shape their own priorities and to shape their own policies, and a rebalancing of the constitution; if we are one of the most heavily centralised countries across Europe, if not the globe, then a rebalancing of that that comes from the devolution process is something that would be very worthy.

Alexandra Jones: May I just add on evaluation that the What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth, of which we are a partner with the London School of Economics, is talking to some of the city regions about developing a way of evaluating what they are doing—a quite rigorous way of evaluating—so they can assess very clearly what works and what does not and reallocate resources accordingly? There are different ways of making sure that we are evaluating.

The final point I would make is that a centralised approach has not resulted in the same happening everywhere. You do not get success everywhere. You do not get the same outcomes if you live in London versus Stoke on Trent. You get different access to standards of education. If you live in different cities, you have different levels of education. The schools, in general, are different. You get different opportunities to access jobs. It is different at the moment; it is not the same everywhere. What I would not want to see is if you have devolution and you still have different outcomes but they might be slightly better, that it is seen as a failure. When people do different things, it should not be seen that devolution is a failure, because I am not sure centralisation has resulted in everything being the same. What we should be doing is holding places to account for delivering, but if you do get some innovations, people are taking some risks and not everything works, the success should be seen as learning from that

rather than that meaning we should go back to a centralised system where you do not have the same outcomes everywhere either.

Q10 Mr Prisk: Turning to the Bill and what is good and bad about it from your individual perspectives—you have highlighted some of these points already—clearly it is an enabling Bill, so it creates a framework. What, in your individual views, do you feel are its strengths and weaknesses, both as an enabling Bill but also in terms of its content?

Professor Copus: There are key clauses that are particular strengths. I will just cherry-pick some of these, if you like. The idea of shifting the intermediate status for European Structural Funds, for example, in the cases of Cornwall and also Greater Manchester, and allowing those particular combinations, or Cornwall, to be able to play that role and to make decisions about the allocation of those funds within their areas, is a really important step, and it is an easy step to overlook in some respects. It does open up these combined authorities to making key decisions about the development of their particular areas.

Also, Clause 8 interests me, which is the possible transfer of functions from public bodies to combined authorities—the idea that at some point in the future, should these organisations be judged to be a success, the likelihood is that there is more that could come their way. That element of indicating that success comes with certain rewards is, again, a really powerful part of what the Bill is attempting to do.

We have already touched on the mayoral and the governance aspects. Again, this is a personal position and I know it makes me extremely unpopular with the rest of the local government community, but I do think the move towards elected mayors is the right one. I know the House of Lords saw differently on that point, but the original intention to place a high-profile elected individual at the head of these new organisations is absolutely right. The Bill does require to be seen in that vein, as an enabling Bill; it needs to provide a framework. There is a danger when we are undergoing these sorts of journeys that we want to prescribe the way in which the thing should be undertaken and what the processes should be, and there is a danger that processes become the purpose of some of these things. What we need to do is to keep an eye on the idea that this is, at the moment anyway, primarily about an economic agenda and about bringing organisations together to control great chunks of the public service and to be able to democratise and legitimise other areas of the public service that previously have not been accountable in any way directly to the public. That framework that is provided to do that is a real strength. The danger of avoiding prescription is still there, though, and it depends on how some of the

negotiations turn out individually and whether Government and those conducting the negotiations with individual authorities are able to be flexible in the way that the Bill implies.

Q11 Mr Prisk: The danger is what, precisely?

Professor Copus: There is a danger that the Bill will set up a structure that does not provide for the right sort of flexibility that is required within localities. Take, for example, areas that might want to be part of two combined authorities or might want to be part of one or, indeed, not part of one at all. What happens if a district within a combined authority does not want to be part of that? Although the Bill does not force this, there is a temptation along the lines to try to force authorities into a particular shape. That should be avoided.

Q12 Mr Prisk: Barnsley is in two LEPs now, and sought to be so.

Professor Copus: Exactly, yes.

Professor Pike: It is a critical piece in terms of the Bill. It is a massive opportunity to try to give some greater shape while maintaining this flexibility in its enabling stance. It is an important opportunity to give greater shape in terms of the vision, purpose, direction and timescale of this decentralisation process. If you look at international experience, there is not really a precedent for a large unitary state with a very large element within it—i.e. England within the UK—that has proceeded with decentralisation in such a loose and unplanned manner. The Bill is a very important opportunity to try to help to define and put a bit of shape on that. In other countries, there is a great degree of diversity and variety—*asymmetry*, as they call it in the technical jargon—about how decentralisation works. It is not one-size-fits-all; you can have different shapes and sizes. Crucially, where they have used their legislative frameworks, it is in trying to get an understanding of how the system fits together and works as a whole; otherwise, you start to bring in complexity, overlap, duplication and all of the bureaucratic and administrative inefficiencies that perhaps you might not want to see from governance reform. It is very important in that regard.

Where it again has other opportunities is in trying to nudge, if not push, some of the Whitehall departments to take a much stronger and more positive stance towards decentralisation. As we well know—it has been well established by this Committee and others—different departments have different views on decentralisation. This Bill could be quite useful in terms of trying to spur some focus, if you like. In particular the

amendments around getting every Government Bill, and even getting every Government department, perhaps, to make links to decentralisation as part of their planning processes, for example, might be another useful thing to look at to try to embed decentralisation across Government, rather than making it the preserve of maybe only one or two Government departments.

Alexandra Jones: I would agree with the strengths being around its enabling. Metro mayors, particularly for the larger areas, are very positive. There is no governance model that is a panacea, but it is a positive thing because it is a democratically accountable role that operates across not just a local authority but a wider area, which is important when you are looking at some of those major issues—transport, strategic planning, housing and others.

You asked if there is anything missing. One of the challenges of it is that fiscal devolution is not in the Bill. In fact, it is prevented. At the moment, mayors are not allowed to borrow. I know there is a line in the Bill that says they are not allowed to do that. I know there has been an amendment put forward by the Chair around this, which we would support, because it would remove what is a prescription. One of the few prescriptive elements of the Bill is that you are not allowed to borrow. That may have changed with the announcements on business rates last week, but we would suggest that it would be good to remove that line and ensure that there is the opportunity for a metro mayor to borrow prudentially in order to invest in the local area. That is one shift that we would like to see to make sure that it is not quite so prescriptive in that area.

Q13 Mr Prisk: Alex, Centre for Cities has put out the idea in the past about the concept of a presumption in favour of devolution. It reflects what Professor Pike was talking about earlier—that the cultural shift now is as important within Whitehall as it is in the town halls.

Alexandra Jones: Absolutely. I would completely agree with what Professor Pike was saying there. It is enormously important. One of the big challenges getting the devolution deals done, so I understand—and it was true with the city deals and the growth deals—is ensuring that the Whitehall departments both agree to it and there is that cultural shift, but also that they are able to do it. Some of the ways that monies and accountabilities are organised make it quite difficult even if they are willing—and I am not suggesting all Whitehall departments are willing—because they are being held to account for the way monies are spent. There is a big cultural shift and a big accountability shift that goes beyond the Bill, but the Bill is helpful in

creating an environment in which you can be requiring Whitehall departments to think differently about the way they do policy and to think about some of those big areas.

Q14 Mr Prisk: Can I ask all of you about structures? Professor Copus, you talked about this yourself earlier, and your anxiety about risks and dangers and softening up—that is the sort of language that you used. Should current local structures be allowed to control the future structure of where we go with local governance? There are immense financial pressures. There is a strong recognition that place-based public services is the way forward. You, Alex, mentioned the idea of being much more focused on outcomes than inputs. I just wonder whether as a Bill it is ambitious enough in terms of the question around structures. Does it matter that sub-committee B of established councillors that have been gathering since time immemorial should be the reason why modern city regions should not advance? I would be interested in your views on that.

Professor Copus: I come from the starting point that when we talk about local government we often fail to ask the question, “What is its purpose?” Often we rush to questions about structure, size and scale without really thinking through what local government is there for. If you could just indulge me for a couple of minutes, I have been on a study trip in Slovenia recently. There, all municipalities have broadly the same competences, functions and responsibilities. There is a municipality in Slovenia with 312 people. While I was there, two died. There are 310 people there now. They have exactly the same competences as the capital city, Ljubljana. The first question is: how does a municipality of that scale make it work? It makes it work because the framework within which it operates is one that enables it to co-operate and work with other authorities—other municipalities—to provide the services that are required. Across Europe, many other countries do not necessarily tackle the issue of austerity or of financial problems by rushing to questions about amalgamating local government. Some do. Those that have, however, still have units of local government far smaller than the average size of councils in England. Often what we are seeing in England particularly is not a failure of small local government but a failure of big local government by comparison with everywhere else. We need to ask those questions.

The one thing we do know is the larger local government gets, the more distant it gets from the people it is supposed to serve. The democratic criteria start to crumble. Turnout at local elections, engagement with councils, trust in council officers and councillors, indeed, all starts to deteriorate the larger local government becomes,

yet there is no guaranteed outcome that things will be cheaper, more efficient and more effective. We have known this for 50 years. We have known this for a long time, yet we still have this desire to answer the perceived problems of local government by increases in scale, or increases in size. It is really a question of what we want local government to do. If it gets bigger and bigger, it gets larger and larger, and it gets more and more distant, there is no guarantee it will get more efficient, more effective and cheaper, but the people are likely to become more disengaged from it. It is wholly wrong, then, for Government of any sort to turn round and say to local government, "People do not care about you. They are disengaged. Look at your turnout levels." It is a consequence of that increase in scale.

There are other ways of dealing with the issues that you have spoken about. If you look at the countries I am most familiar with at the moment, Poland and Portugal, they deal with this issue of the financial factors by allowing local government to co-operate amongst itself in a much freer framework. If local councils in Poland, for example, create a combination of authorities under an appropriate Act of Parliament to run particular services, the only requirement they have on them is to write to the Government and say, "We have now created this authority" or "this combination". The Government then writes that in a book. That is in stark contrast to what combinations of councils have had to go through here. There are alternative ways of dealing with the issue that you have alighted on without destroying the local roots of local government.

Alexandra Jones: You would not necessarily start from here if you were planning the way that local government is arranged in England. That is probably true for everywhere. Ideally, you would not have a situation where it is impossible for local areas that wish to do so to work with neighbouring areas. One of the challenges, though, about this debate is that combined authorities are being formed to do certain things; they are not being formed to do everything. I do not think it stops you working with some neighbours on some things and some neighbours on others. That should continue. It is messy, but that is how it works in other countries. It is messy. It looks different in different areas. That should be enabled to happen. Should you have a situation where it is very difficult to work with your neighbours formally in a combined authority—I know this is a very live debate—in order to work together on transport, say, that is very challenging, but ideally it would be local areas working out how they can work together most effectively on different issues. You should not have a committee stopping things happening. I do not know how much that does happen.

What you should have is a lot of challenge from national Government back to local areas to make sure they are working as efficiently and effectively as possible, but ideally it is local areas working together that define what that looks like.

What is interesting is when you have something on the table like metro mayors, with powers attached, how many local areas have responded. They have said, "Okay, we did not necessarily want a metro mayor, but we can understand there are benefits from working together. We will have a metro mayor"—some of them have said, "We will put up with it"; others have said, "We are very happy to go towards it"—"provided we get something else". That is an interesting way—incentives on the table—to encourage people to work together, so there is a clear gain politically and economically to doing something in a different way so that perhaps that committee can be convinced.

Ideally, you would not start from here. You should have places working together—you have to—on things transport and economic growth. The precise arrangements for different things will vary, and so they should. There are some situations where it is quite challenging to get places working together. Archaic rules can prevent that; new rules can prevent that. In terms of how you put together a combined authority, there are all sorts of challenges around contiguous boundaries. That will vary. Challenge from national Government, and local government and national Government working together, is probably the only way that you will get that resolved. I am not sure that some of the situations and the discussions going on in parts of the country—Yorkshire I know is one of them—will be resolved just by abolishing things or changing things by diktat.

Professor Pike: When you look internationally, the recent analysis from the OECD has pointed to the issue of local government fragmentation as being a real brake upon economic and productivity growth, particularly within metropolitan areas. It is quite interesting that there is a presumption towards an upscaling of governance—bigger units, larger scale, in the way in which Colin and Alex described—as being helpful and co-operative. It is difficult in a governance system where you are trying to find that appropriate scale for policy interventions, because there is not a single scale that fits all the various aspects of it. Skills you might want to do at a labour market area; transport maybe too. Is innovation policy something you would want to do at the local area or not? There is quite a complex question to answer—this point about what is the appropriate scale at which you should have these administrative structures. The big issue then, particularly in a mature democracy such as our own, is that we have

these big institutional legacies in terms of what is there in terms of the structures we have already and how we choose to go about changing those and what sort of decentralisation process—we are back to that ad hoc, piecemeal way of how we are trying to play at the moment—and what is the way in which we try to do reform. Is it evolutionary and incremental, or is there some big-bang shift that you want to instigate? How do you try to get it to work? That is the key.

Q15 Mr Prisk: Do you feel, in that context, that maps matter more than the structures? One of the issues you have all raised is the economic geography. I declare an obvious interest in this, as I was involved as the Minister in helping set those boundaries, but the conversation tended to be, “This is the city region we would like to have, Minister” rather than, “This is the city region you shall have”. Do you think maps are the underplayed element in this?

Professor Pike: Absolutely, yes. As a good geographer, I would say maps are fundamentally important in all this. The crucial thing is trying to get a sense of what are the appropriate units that we want to govern. Where are we going to think about economic change, social change and environmental change? What are the geographical boundaries, if you like, that we might like to draw around the world out there to try to govern it? Clearly, we have a whole lot of inherited maps and administrative boundaries; we have a whole lot of very fluid things. The economy moves beyond administrative boundaries; society does, in term of demographic and commuting flows; and environmental issues and problems do not observe these boundaries either. We are left with a very fluid world and a desire to try to fix some boundaries for institutions to work and do things—to enact policy and make strategies and so forth. It is a very difficult situation to try to resolve.

The one thing we have suffered from, perhaps, is that in this ad hoc and piecemeal process some of our areas make sense and fit together as functional economic areas, for example—they work well in terms of having vaguely coterminous boundaries sometimes—but some of them do not. Those gaps and those missing bits—the white spaces, almost, if you like—are where we have the problems and where these things do not fit together so well. The trouble is the decentralisation process is being driven fastest and furthest by these trailblazers where it does fit together best at the moment. That is going to leave a situation where we have lots of places in their wake, really, trailing behind, trying to keep up with the process as it is currently constituted.

Q16 Mr Prisk: Thank you for that. Just running on to the last element of this, before I hand back to the Chairman, I wonder from the comments that you have made whether the process itself is felt to be perhaps too clunky or, as Professor Pike has suggested, that it has too many speeds for different areas. Let me turn that round. Would it have been better to have a Bill that simply said, to go back to your original idea as Centre for Cities, “We now have a presumption in favour of devolution. End of the Bill. Over to you, local government”? Would that have been the complete alternative, so that local authorities not only have a say about whether they want to participate but say what they want to participate in, perhaps beyond anything that is in this Bill?

Alexandra Jones: It is an interesting idea. The process has not been perfect at all. Places are rushing to complete the bids within the timescales—4 September then 25 November—but given there is the Spending Review on 25 November there is a deadline for thinking about how you might allocate funds to major areas. There are ideal ways, perhaps, to do this, and then there is the way you need to do it in order to comply with some of the budgetary timelines.

What you are seeing is different speeds for different places. The Centre for Cities has long been in favour of that. Some places are ready for and want different powers. They want to take on more. Having not sympathised with Whitehall earlier, I do sympathise in that it does take quite a lot to change some of the systems, processes and structures. Given the capacity for places to do that and the capacity for Whitehall to start making these changes, I would expect to see a smaller number of very big deals, like the Manchester one, which act as trailblazers and then some smaller deals. That is not to say that you do not get deals for different areas where they wish to have them, but they may well be, both from Government’s perspective but also from the place’s perspective, smaller. That is what they want. That is what is wanted; that is what is needed.

It has not been an ideal process. You may well get this idea of the presumption of devolution after some of this flurry of deals that are being done in time for the Spending Review, and you should get that. What you see with Manchester is over the last year they have got more and more and more. London has got more and more since it was set up in 2000. We would like to see it get even more, and we think the London Finance Commission’s proposals around property taxes—I know Professor Travers is sitting over there; I am not just saying it because of that—are absolutely worth implementing. You should see this as the start of a process. The presumption of devolution would be great if it happened afterwards, but this was the only way, given the

circumstances, you could do it—not perfect, but enabling some places that were ready to do so to come forward with some proposals. I think you will see different tiers and hopefully greater devolution and evolution afterwards, and the chance for different places to do that and to ask for more as time goes on.

Professor Pike: Again, you do not want a top-down Whitehall blueprint for this; neither do you want a complete bottom-up free for all. It is trying to work between these two, and the Bill is a key opportunity to try to do this—to give a greater degree at the minute of vision, of purpose and of direction, and even indicative timescales in terms of how this process is unfolding. At the minute, it is lurching about from the perspective of the local actors and perhaps some of the central actors too. Maybe giving it a degree more shape would help both central Government, in terms of planning capacity and dealing with the multitude of proposals on devolution from the local teams, but also the local teams, to give maybe not predictability but a degree more certainty and shape to the process as it is unfolding. That would help in terms of helping how this works out.

Professor Copus: Could I just make a quick comment on your question about the map and then answer this one?

Chair: You will have to be a little bit briefer in some of the responses; otherwise, we are going to go over the time.

Professor Copus: I was just going to say on the idea of a map that we did have that in 1972. We did start from there. We squeezed all of the efficiency savings and scale savings out of local government in 1972. The anniversary of that Act's Royal Assent is coming up some time this month. It was a major attempt to achieve some of the re-drawing in the way that you were talking.

On the issue of the process of the Bill and the framework of the Bill, it is coming back to the point I was making earlier about over-prescription. There is a clunkiness about it. There is an element of setting out the way in which things could be done. In many respects, maybe we did need a Bill that simply did say something like, "We now expect local government to work together and this is an experiment in council joint-working; over to you" to allow those areas with the knowledge of their priorities and their problems and their policies to come together in appropriate combinations and simply to start working. There is the idea of Government approval; we assume that it is right that if authorities want to work together and to create this new entity it needs to be approved by the Government. I would challenge that as an

issue. We do need to take a much lighter touch. Indeed, in many respects, maybe even general competence could have been used to get local authorities working in the way that they are working now.

Q17 Helen Hayes: Really quickly, because we do have questions on London further down the agenda, I just wanted to ask in this section on the scope of the Bill whether you think that London is a problematic omission.

Chair: Brief answers, because we are going to come on to London again.

Alexandra Jones: I believe there has been a Private Bill introduced around London. London should be gaining at least the same amount of devolution as Manchester. London is our major city. We should see London getting additional powers. It is a problem if the Bill does not enable that to happen, yes.

Professor Pike: It comes back to this point that it is an opportunity for thinking about how the system in England fits together, and London is a key part of that.

Professor Copus: London has often been dealt with differently legislatively, and I do not see a need to change that now. There are special circumstances when we start to talk about London government.

Q18 Mary Robinson: Just going back again to the structures and the non-prescriptive nature of it in Manchester, we were talking about Manchester perhaps getting more and more and more. Just thinking about the way that things fit together, with the integration of health and social care now being put into the mix, do you see this rolling out of extra powers and more devolution being a challenge to accountability in any way?

Alexandra Jones: It is important that we keep the accountability under review and look at how, with health and social care there, accountability operates. You have the metro mayor; you have the councillors holding the metro mayor to account locally. There are questions to be raised and discussions to be had about what that means within Parliament as well, given those greater powers.

Professor Pike: I mentioned at the start one of the purposes of decentralisation could be around accountability, but it has often been shuffled lower down the list. Clearly, issues around scrutiny and transparency should be at the forefront of any discussions on decentralised arrangements. There are lots of models from other

countries that could be used and adapted in the UK context. If we are going to try to get any sense of wider public engagement and citizens caring about what this decentralisation is about and is for, and maybe even electing these metro mayors in time, we need to be much more attentive to questions of accountability in this discussion.

Professor Copus: It is one of the areas I am concerned about, and I do not think that the Bill is robust enough in what it says about the scrutiny arrangements for combined authorities. Scrutiny is the Cinderella part of local government in ordinary councils. That mistake is being replicated; it looks as though it is almost going to be the Cinderella aspect of combined authorities as well. There certainly needs to be a much more robust mechanism for holding to account not only the mayor but the entire combined authority—its entire membership and, indeed, those other organisations that are associated with it. The health service is one.

Q19 Julian Knight: You have all spoken about the need for extensive fiscal devolution. I am just wondering to what extent you think the Chancellor's announcement on business rates is game-changing in that respect.

Alexandra Jones: It is an important, positive step. It is really good to see that councils are retaining business rates, but you do have the top-ups and tariffs system, so it is still quite a complicated system. It is understandably so, because it is important to have redistribution in the system to make sure that the areas with weaker economies do not lose out completely and those with substantially stronger economies—Westminster; the City of London—make a contribution. It is a great first step. The system is still quite complex, understandably. What you also see is it is still quite a small proportion of taxes raised. At the moment, the UK is a big outlier by international standards. We are one of the most centralised systems in the world. About 1.7% of taxes are set locally, and that is all council tax. Even with the business rates, just with the 50% retained so far, that only raises to about 2.5% of taxes kept locally. It will rise a bit, but not substantially. Property taxes, which include business rates, are about 10% of all taxes, so even if you kept all property taxes, you would only be keeping about 10% of taxes locally. If you compare this internationally, about 16% of taxes are set and kept locally in Sweden, about 15% in Canada and about 11% in Germany. It is important. It is a really significant step, and it is great to change the conversation. It will not be completely game-changing; there is more that could be done.

Professor Pike: The important principle is that decentralisation without meaningful fiscal powers can be quite hollow. It might be of questionable effectiveness as well. The UK remains, despite the modest reforms that we have seen since 2010, very centralised by international standards, as Alex was suggesting. There is consensus about the need for change but less consensus about the detail of it. At the moment, again, we are having ad hoc, piecemeal changes. We are getting some small changes in terms of fiscal powers through the city deals and other mechanisms, then we are getting top-down announcements about decentralisation on the business rates side.

In other countries, they have tried to use institutions to keep an eye on what are often very complex and specialised systems of public finance that have grown up in countries—the Commonwealth Grants Commission in Australia, for example, deals with the distribution of monies across the various states in a federal system—but when you are in a large, complex state like the UK with a very complex and entrenched legacy system of public finance, maybe you do need some kind of institutional innovation to keep an eye on this. How many times have we come back to the question of the balance of funding between central and local government in the UK? Many, many times—and then we shelve the report and carry on. Maybe now is the opportunity, in the midst of this process of decentralisation, to think about an agency or a commission—some sort of institution—to be set up to monitor, to assess and to do the proper thinking and working-through of how the public finance system works. It is very complicated. The equalisation and the transfer elements within it to try to hold a degree of fairness that underpins the national political-economic settlement is a very important part of that.

Professor Copus: I would be interested in pushing for full fiscal autonomy for local government. What the Chancellor has done in the announcement is a step in the right direction, but we still end up with one of the most restricted tax regimes for local government certainly across Europe. We really need to be somewhat bolder in the basket of taxation powers that local councils can have. The tourist tax is often one that is used as an example.

Q20 Julian Knight: Within combined authorities and some of the proposals that are going forward there is the idea of greater tax powers beyond business rates—for example, air passenger duty. Do you see that as wholly good, or can you also see dangers?

Professor Copus: When you give taxation powers to any elected body, there are always going to be problems with complaints about

levels and whether certain things should be taxed or not, but the reality of the situation is that we do need to expand that basket of taxes, and, yes, in the combined-authority agenda there are opportunities to do that. I still think it is quite narrow compared to the regimes that exist elsewhere, and there is a question about, “Why just combined authorities? Why not the rest of local government?” We do need to be looking at that range of alternatives—those different mechanisms and different tax-raising powers in different areas—that local government across the rest of the globe has at its behest and working out which ones of those would fit in our circumstances. The other thing is we have to accept that there will be different taxes raised in different areas for different purposes. It is also not just about taxation; it is about other financial freedoms and the ability to raise revenue through a range of mechanisms. We tend to be very risk-averse with local government when it comes to the financing side, but without freeing that up we talk about devolution but I fear we are really talking about decentralisation, which is the passing down of tasks, functions and responsibilities rather than real powers.

Q21 Julian Knight: So it feels like a giant leap but actually it is just baby steps at the moment. That is what you are saying.

Professor Copus: Yes, but they are going in the right direction.

Q22 Julian Knight: What are the likely consequences, do you think, of the business rate reforms, as proposed, for areas with low tax bases? Will this mean, in effect, that economic growth becomes the key driver for raising revenue?

Professor Copus: It depends on how you look at the financial base of any particular council area. It is possible that in changes to any tax—and we are talking about business rates here—there will be some areas that will benefit and there will clearly be some areas that will benefit less or, indeed, not at all. That is why it is important to link that change to other changes. It is possible that you could see business development being choked off by the inappropriate use of business rates. It is possible in other areas, with a certain amount of flexibility and imagination, that the business-rate mechanisms can be used to encourage business growth. It depends on how free either combined authorities or local government are to use these particular systems. What is on offer at the moment is the ability to decrease the business rate but not increase it, unless you have a directly elected mayor and then there is a potential for some slight increases. There needs to be the ability for both combined authorities and local government to make

decisions about whether they want to give discounts; to whom they want to give discounts; whether they use business rates as purely an economic policy driver or whether they use them as a social policy driver; and whether they will charge higher rates for betting shops in high streets. There are all sorts of policy tools there. We simply have to say to local government, "These are now yours to use".

Q23 Julian Knight: Should we be concerned, therefore, that there may be winners and losers in that process? Should we be concerned for the losers?

Alexandra Jones: There will be winners and losers. You will start out and in the first year nobody will lose out; then, after that, if you have a stronger economy you will gain, and if you have a weaker economy you will lose out. There are safety nets in place. If you lose more than 7.5% of your business rates then the Government will help. One of the big challenges will be appeals. Local authorities really struggle with appeals now. If you have too many big businesses appealing on business rates, you do not get the money in. There is real uncertainty. By definition, there will be winners and losers. There is a safety net. What will be interesting will be to see whether the incentives are in place to make sure that places can grow their economy, or have the flexibility to make some decisions that will help their economy grow—and make sure there is help for those that will struggle. I think you will see more places working with neighbours to make sure that they can make the most of their particular strengths. Some have suggested there will be a race to the bottom because of this, with places with weaker economies just dropping rates. We have not seen that. So far, places have been able to drop their rates. Only three have been able to afford to do that, because you have to be able to fund the gap. I do not think you will see that. I think you will see places responding to the incentive and probably having to work with neighbours in order to make sure that they gain more rates.

Professor Pike: It is a welcome measure. It is quite small and quite volatile, and is subject to appeals, but it is a helpful step in the right direction. The interesting things will be what innovations can come on the back of it in terms of the pooling of business rates amongst larger areas, and the engagement, perhaps, with local business about certain precepts and additional things to pay for bits of infrastructure. There are some innovative funding and financing type things that might be done around this degree of flexibility over business rates that might be of interest too. Fundamentally, it could be a very regressive measure if you are localising the tax base around the business buoyancy and

prosperity in local economies, which, as we know, varies greatly across the UK, hence the idea about the system and the equalisation and transfer things are key.

Q24 Mary Robinson: You talk about working with other authorities. I am just wondering what you think would be the incentives for, let us say, a combined devolved authority—Greater Manchester, let us say—to work with a neighbouring shire regarding any changes to business rates.

Alexandra Jones: It may be that they would gain financially. If you were pooling business rates across, and if that shire provides labour, which they tend to, and there are some benefits from extending transport—it would be looking at what deals could be done so there would be benefit to both. That is the only way these things work: if there is no loss on either side and there is benefit to both. It is about ensuring there are structures in place that enable those conversations to happen.

Q25 Mary Robinson: We have talked quite a bit and I have mentioned Greater Manchester devolution. What, in your view, has made the Greater Manchester devolution deal a success?

Professor Pike: Greater Manchester has certainly been the focus—the crucible, if you like—of decentralisation in the current wave. There is a very particular—even unique—set of characteristics there: its economic geography, its institutional arrangements and history, its political geography and its prioritisation by particularly the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We need some caution and some detailed scrutiny and reflection on it in two areas. One is just to try to think about the extent to which its current experience and position can be a model for other places to emulate and to follow. That is because in some ways Greater Manchester has been given some things on a pilot basis—some experimental things on a trial basis—that other places have not been given. It is hard to see, until that is tested and assessed and evaluated and proven in sensible ways, whether that then becomes a model for what can be done elsewhere and adapted elsewhere. Secondly—and the institutions in Greater Manchester are busy trying to do this—is to work out how on earth you monitor and evaluate how these changes have worked through, and then you can see whether or not they have made the kinds of differences to the big things that you wanted to move, whether it be in terms of economic growth, the spread of that economic growth across Greater Manchester rather than just being concentrated in its geographical core, the kinds of savings and better

public service outcomes you are getting from integration, and so forth. It is certainly interesting. It is the trailblazer, the focus—the symbol, if you like—of this decentralisation process, but we need to tread carefully and think and assess and evaluate and make some steps towards trying to work out what difference decentralisation makes or not.

Professor Copus: One of the key successes is that this has not come fully formed at the same time as the devolution agenda came from central Government. There has been a long period of stable and very good political leadership in the area. There have been opportunities taken to minimise some of the political rivalries. To me, as well as the geographical issues that you mentioned, there is a success story in political leadership here. Whether that can be replicated elsewhere is another matter. I doubt whether Manchester provides a model for elsewhere, because of the specifics of the Manchester area and the Manchester case. Other areas will have to find their own route. There are certainly examples, both good and bad, that can be drawn from the process and can be taken from the Manchester deal as it is written on paper, but in the spirit of devolution it is dangerous to look for a model. You can look for examples that work and that have not worked, but the search for a model rather undermines what devolution and localism is about.

Alexandra Jones: There are strong lessons from the process. You cannot lift it wholesale and drop it elsewhere, but in the way they have done things—the way they have learned to work together and establish trust—I think there are lessons for other places. Also, not being Manchester should not stop places from doing devolution deals. Often people will say, “We are not Manchester. We have not been working together for 20 years; therefore, it is very difficult.” Evidence from city regions around the country shows that you can contract that process somewhat and you can learn some of the lessons from what Manchester has done, because it has been a trailblazer.

Q26 Mary Robinson: With greater autonomy comes greater risk. What would happen if Greater Manchester were to fail?

Alexandra Jones: It depends how it is treated, partly. What would failure mean? How are you measuring failure? What are the outcomes by which you say it has failed? Would you be comparing that to the previous centralised process, or it is because it has not quite met what was hoped for? If you devolve—the same way as if you have a centralised system—you have certain outcomes you are aiming for. You need to be very clear what failure is, and not assume that

devolution is the failure. Perhaps the way things are run might have been the failure. I am sure Greater Manchester has great leadership; I am not suggesting that would be the case, but you need to be very clear what you are expecting and what are the things that might have contributed to that. If things do not work in the way that was expected, you would expect Greater Manchester to have systems in place to change things quickly, but also there would be scrutiny from elsewhere, including from Parliament, to ensure that they can be challenged and that measures can be taken to improve things.

Professor Pike: There has been an awful lot of political capital invested in Greater Manchester, centrally, locally and within the broader city region also. That is an important point to take into account. What is interesting is the extent to which what they have tried to do in Greater Manchester is to make the connections between economic and social policy that have not been experimented with elsewhere. There is a sense that there is a degree of trial and error—of “let’s see if we can actually do this”—to get the health and social care integration and the savings that that delivers. I suspect across that suite of things they are trying to do in a decentralised way in Greater Manchester there will be some things that will not work as well as expected, and it is important that there is a robust evaluation, monitoring and assessment system in there to learn the lessons from that.

The other side of it is the extent to which the aspiration you hear amongst some in Greater Manchester is to turn them into a surplus-generating city region. That is more interesting in terms of whether that is a success or not. If you are going to judge whether Greater Manchester has worked or not on the success of efforts to turn it from a city region that is a net recipient of transfers from central Government into one that is a net contributor, that is setting the bar extremely high and extremely flexibly.

Professor Copus: I would just reiterate the point that it really depends on how you define failure and what it is you are looking to achieve in the first place—and also what the reasons are for any perceived failure. Are they a failure of the devolution agreement, are they a failure of a process within devolution, or are they a failure of some extraneous process? If a large-scale employer withdraws from an area and closes down something, is that a failure of devolution, is it a failure of the new combined authority to tackle that, or is it something completely beyond its control? If measures of health in an area do not improve, again, it is being able to identify whether it is a failure because of these new arrangements or not. There are lots of very

exciting—as you said—policy connections being drawn that have not been drawn in the past. There are policy areas being drawn into much more of a public focus than they have been in the past. That is inevitably going to highlight both strengths and weaknesses. Do not get me wrong when I say this. I think we can tolerate failure; we cannot tolerate being a failure. If things go wrong and are restructured and put right, that is one thing; it is that long-term idea of things not working that we have to be much more concerned about.

Q27 Mary Robinson: In terms of the devolution to, let us say, Greater Manchester, to what extent it can still evolve, then, under that model?

Alexandra Jones: I think it can still evolve. If you look at London, it has evolved. If you look around the world, these things evolve. They change. People learn; they think about new ways to do things. So, it can, and the Bill should provide, because it is enabling, the opportunity for it to evolve.

Professor Pike: It is the old Ron Davies line: it is “a process, not an event”. These things do have a momentum and a dynamism and an evolution to them. It is interesting in the case of city regions, though, to look at some experience in other countries. In Canada, you can find a book written about Toronto’s secession from the Canadian union. These things do have an end game, perhaps, which we do need to be mindful of, but we are some way off that, I suspect. Even the staunchest Mancunian would not be asking for that, perhaps, yet.

Q28 Bob Blackman: Just a quick question about Manchester. I was at a meeting last week where it was suggested that public health funding in Manchester has been reassigned, so they are using their allocation of public health money not for the intended use. How much of a risk is it going to be in an area like Manchester, where they may, for their own reasons locally, choose to divert the money for other particular purposes and therefore Government targets for health and dealing with the inequalities of health, etc. are not achieved?

Alexandra Jones: That will be a risk, because it is up to them to decide how the monies are spent. That is part of the devolution. There will be outcomes that they are trying to achieve, and it may be that they feel spending the money on something else will better achieve the outcome than spending it on public health as defined by Government. It is the outcomes that should be the focus, rather than the process for getting there. It is when Whitehall is trying to control that process that

things can go wrong, but it certainly will be a risk, depending on how things are measured and assessed.

Q29 Bob Blackman: Will there, then, be pressure? Will people say, “Hang on. Wait a minute. You have not made people in Manchester healthier because you changed the funding” and therefore devolution comes under pressure?

Alexandra Jones: I am sure it will come under pressure. It may be that they feel diverting funding elsewhere will result in healthier people just by spending it, as I said, on something slightly different. There are all sorts of connections that can be made that are not obvious—for example, gritting. If you spend some money on gritting, it saves the health service money, because when it snows fewer people break their legs when you grit the pavements. That does not sound like spending on health, but you are contributing to saving money on health. That is a very small example of where they may be making these decisions in order to achieve the outcomes; it just might not look like that initially.

Professor Pike: I suspect your question is getting to this tension between a universalism in terms of the quality of public service provision that is being delivered across the country, and decentralisation’s principle, which is about variations in those provisions of public services. If you are going to let go in a decentralised system for places to make their own decisions about how they make people healthier, wealthier and wiser in their particular patch, then these are the risks that arise, inevitably.

Q30 Bob Blackman: I have a particular anxiety around smoking cessation, which is the problem.

Professor Copus: There are other ways in which that money can be spent that do have a positive effect both on health and on the outcomes of the health service generally. You do not have to spend money in the health service. At that point, in some cases, it is too late. We have had the example of gritting; there is the example of public health education around smoking or alcohol or drug abuse; there is improvements in road transport. There are all sort of areas in which money can be spent that ultimately ends up saving the resources of the health services. Sometimes we hear this term “postcode lottery” used, but a more positive spin on that is “localism”. If some areas have different priorities to achieve the same objectives, then that is really down to those areas to decide, I would argue.

Q31 Chair: Before I move on to Jo, just one point about Manchester. It is a real trailblazer, particularly on economic devolution, but do you think there is a danger to some extent that we see the Manchester model now as the only way of doing devolution? Just take health and social care. It does not have to be done, does it, on a city region basis? Is it not just as possible that individual local authorities can come forward with their clinical commissioning groups and say, "We want to join up health and social care on a single pot of money at an individual local authority level" and that could work as well? It is almost as though everything is now seen as it has to be city region or nothing. Is there a danger from that? Just briefly, because I want to move on to Jo.

Alexandra Jones: There may be a risk of it, but Sheffield has come forward for its devolution deal and it does not have health and social care. I do not think you are seeing the Manchester model as the only way to do it; you are seeing different deals. To your question about whether it has to be city region or not at all, that is a debate to be had. It might be the case, but nothing is ruled out yet.

Professor Pike: You have to have a robust, tested reflection upon something to start calling it a model. This is the fundamental thing. Otherwise it is hoisted up and declared a model when we do not know whether it really works or not. I am not saying that is the case in Manchester, but we just need to think about the terminology that we are using. Maybe the importance within a decentralising system in the round is the idea that we have knowledge sharing across places so that we can adapt the things that places are doing to better meet those local circumstances within the central frameworks in which we work. It is trying to find a way of doing that that is the key.

Professor Copus: There is a real danger in looking at one area as a model. Your point about whether individual authorities could become part of the devolution agenda is vital; if devolution is going to be a success, it works on different levels in different places, and there are dangers in focusing wholly on a city region and metropolitan areas.

Q32 Jo Cox: Just moving to non-metropolitan areas, what is your assessment of the Government's approach and evolution of thinking on how to cope with the inherent challenges for non-metropolitan areas?

Professor Pike: The general ad hoc, piecemeal approach has been accompanied with a little bit of an urban bias early on in the process. Most of this is about being able to capture the weight of population and the economy within England, but this, as you alluded to with the question, has left some gaps. One of the issues for non-mets is trying to articulate cases and rationales for decentralisation that try to deal

with the Government's and the Treasury's economic yardstick. They are often not big in terms of their economic mass, or in their ability to have decentralised powers and deliver an increase in employment or in GVA—economic output—within their areas. One of the key things is trying to understand what yardsticks are being used to decide and judge decentralisation and whether they are going to be appropriate to the claims and aspirations of non-met areas. Similarly on the other rationale of public service reform and transformation; this is challenging to do in non-mets where you have a large area with a sparse population. It is maybe even more challenging when you try to get these non-mets to work together, because you have an even larger area and even sparser population. It is just having a sensitivity to the particular challenges that non-met areas face in the broader process of decentralisation, which might be important to look at.

Professor Copus: The urban bias is what indicates the thrust of devolution being largely an economic and an economic-regeneration thrust. That is not to say that county areas do not contribute vastly to the national economy, because they do, and the County Councils Network has provided figures to indicate the strength of county-based economies. The strength of those economies rests on what the districts do as well. What devolution will do in the non-met areas is a question that the non-met areas will have to rise to. They will be looking maybe to different drivers and to different sets of objectives. There is something about the integration of public services. It is strange, this, because we often hear local government criticised for being fragmented and broken up and small, but much of the public service is fragmented as well and runs through different sets of providers. Certainly in a more rural, non-urban area, the devolution deal could look at the way in which those fragmented public services are joined up and maybe run to a better standard than they are at the moment. There are also issues about accountability of organisations that spend great chunks of public money, develop public policy and take public decisions that are not in any way held to account by the public that they serve. Maybe again in non-metropolitan areas that might be much more of a driver: "How do we shape the policies and the decisions of other bodies that impact on our communities?" There are alternative songs that can be sung about the devolution agenda, and I do not think it is wholly an urban agenda. It is being controlled by that at the moment, but that does not necessarily mean to say that non-urban areas cannot gain from this.

Alexandra Jones: As the Centre for Cities, we have an urban bias and we are keen on cities, from an economic growth perspective, leading

the way, although cities have to work with neighbouring areas, many of which are very rural or suburban, and that is important. The key for the non-met areas, many of which include some of the cities we look at in the Centre, is flexibility of the process and being able to respond to them wanting different things and having a different approach. That should be at the heart of this kind of model. It is making sure there is a response to the different issues. Often they do not want the same level of powers—they are not necessarily interested in health and social care; they are interested in slightly different issues. Being able to respond to that is important.

Q33 Jo Cox: Just one last question on this. I do not know how well you know the Cornwall offer, but what is your assessment of whether that might set a model, similarly to the Manchester model, where we become a bit obsessed with Cornwall as a model, or whether, again, that is just an example of what could be done in a particular context?

Professor Copus: It is an example. This might be strange for an academic to say, but it is dangerous to look for models. We spend our lives putting models together, but in this case there is a danger. Cornwall is, again, a very specific set of circumstances, with very specific issues, a very specific geography and very specific problems that it needs to solve. Transport looms large in Cornwall. That is central to the agreement that they have. We can learn lessons from the process—we can learn lessons from the way in which the deal was constructed—but I do not think we can use that particular agreement, necessarily, as a model for elsewhere. I am repeating myself, I know, but if this is about localism, it is dangerous to look for models. What we need is for our councils and our local government to have the courage and the freedom to be able to construct arrangements between themselves that enable them to grapple with the problems that they have. There will always be a tendency to want to look somewhere and ask, “How have you done it?” That is fine, but trying to replicate—trying to take Cornwall and put it in Gloucestershire—is not going to work.

Professor Pike: It is the principle of having decentralised arrangements for a non-urban area that is the key thing with Cornwall, but there are particular characteristics of it. Again going back to the Greater Manchester point, how can you call these things models until you have really tested them and seen whether they work or not? This is key.

Q34 Helen Hayes: We had some discussion earlier, but I wanted to return to the question of overview and scrutiny of directly-elected mayors and combined authorities. Do you think the conventional form of overview and scrutiny committees is the best model of governance? Is that sufficiently strong scrutiny? What are your recommendations in that regard?

Professor Copus: Again to repeat, the provisions within the Bill are a step in the right direction. There has to be some mechanism for holding the newly-elected mayor to account other than the electoral process itself, and there has to be some mechanism for holding to account the membership of a combined authority and exploring the decisions that they take. The Bill also has a parallel for the power of call-in, which is useful.

What I am concerned about is that, first, one of the problems scrutiny has generally is the imbalance in resources and support that it often receives compared to executives. This is understandable. Council leaderships are supported by the chief executive and other senior officers; scrutiny very rarely has that access. I know the chief executive will say, "I treat all members equally but some members are more equal than others". I fear that that culture of local government, which has seen scrutiny not resourced often—I am generalising—in the way in which it should be to be able to do the job properly, may well be transferred into the new combined authorities.

The other issue that scrutiny suffers from is in local government there is not the sophistication of the House of Commons, with one, two and three-line whips; most whips are a three-line whip. The glue that binds parties together in local government often prevents open public scrutiny. Closed party group meetings are still doing a lot of what should be done in overview and scrutiny—again, not exclusively, and the Centre for Public Scrutiny has excellent examples of where scrutiny is operated effectively. It normally operates most effectively when it looks outside the council—when it is not looking at the executive itself but when it looks at the health service or some other body—because the party-political intensity has then gone.

We are in danger, if we draw our scrutiny members from the existing councils and ask them to scrutinise a) a group of council leaders that come from their councils and b) an elected mayor that is a member of their party—potentially so, and more likely to be—of hitting those same issues. There does need to be greater public engagement in the scrutiny process. The Bill allows for non-elected members be part of the process. One of the strengths of the Bill also, if I remember rightly, is that chairs of these combined-authority scrutiny committees will not

come from the same party as the mayor. That is a real strength—this idea that we move beyond the replication of parties. In an area as large as Manchester, it also raises a question about whether there is a possibility of electing a scrutiny body and whether we have something akin to the GLA on a smaller scale that is elected with the sole purpose of scrutinising the combined authority and, indeed, scrutinising all of those bodies that it works with, and that comes with its own mandate and maybe is based on an electoral system that does what the GLA does—that is, ensuring that there is no one party that necessarily will have a majority and that many voices are heard. What has been proposed makes sense, but there are real dangers that it will not be able to do the job that is really required.

Q35 Helen Hayes: The turnout, as you will know, in the mayoral referendums in 2012 was just under 30%. Do you think that the public is sufficiently engaged now first to make directly-elected mayors work and, secondly, to support the scrutiny function of those directly-elected mayors?

Professor Copus: The turnout for elections of mayors is roughly the same as turnouts in council elections, for example. There is a slight difference. The referendums did not attract huge turnouts, unfortunately, but the turnout for mayoral elections and council elections, particularly when they are held on the same day, indicates that the electorate are as engaged as they are—and that is not very much. They are not engaged that much in council elections, whether there are elected mayors are not. That is a real cultural problem that we have, and there are many reasons for that. One is the reduction in the standing and the status of local government over the decades; another is just simply the political culture that we have in this country, which looks at Parliament as being in the centre and all attention being focused on that, so any other elections are second order and attract less attention. That is on the one hand. On the other hand, we do not have thresholds below which the election is null and void; people are still elected whatever the turnout—they still come with a legitimacy and they still come with a mandate—

Q36 Helen Hayes: Although arguably, in the case of police and crime commissioners, for example, the lack of interest has contributed to a lack of strength for that role.

Professor Copus: If you look at elected mayors as opposed to police and crime commissioners, what mayors tend to argue themselves—you might say they would say this—is that their position as being directly

elected, irrespective of turnout, opens up doors that may otherwise remain closed. You have to look at this on the other hand and say what has been achieved in Manchester has been achieved without a directly elected mayor. That is right, but, again, not everywhere is Manchester. Not everywhere has had that longevity of political control; not everywhere has the special circumstances Manchester has had. Elected mayors, and particularly those elected mayors who used to be council leaders, do argue that people understand what being directly elected means and they do not ask, "By the way, what was your turnout?" There is the very fact that you are there as a result of a public election. You can always argue that low turnout damages legitimacy, but until we do something about that—until we say "if turnout falls below this, then the seat is still vacant"—it is a difficult argument to resolve.

Professor Pike: We need to be very guarded that accountability does not become an Achilles heel of the kind of decentralisation we are proceeding with in England. We need to use the Bill and the process as an opportunity to stimulate some innovation, and to try to use it to prompt some connection with this wave of democratic engagement and civic politics we have been seeing in recent years. Fora—maybe things like people's or citizens' assemblies—that can involve economic and social partner groups and so forth in the workings of these decentralised arrangements are very important. One of the fundamental rationales internationally for decentralisation has been around bringing Government closer to people, and if it has powers and it has resources then it is there—it is in your face—and you might then be more engaged with its workings and scrutinise it and vote for the politicians that represent it. This is an opportunity to do some of that.

Alexandra Jones: That is the key point. The directly-elected mayors will have powers. In the referenda, there was not much of a debate about it and there were not really any powers on the table, so people were not really sure what they were engaging with. Provided the mayors have powers and they can demonstrate what they do—it is their responsibility as well to be clear about what they do—if you look at what has happened in London, people do talk about what the mayor does. It is a role that is discussed and debated. With being a directly-elected mayor comes a mandate, and come soft and hard powers—we have done studies on this at the Centre—but there are clear powers. There is a responsibility on that individual to make sure they are talking and encouraging public debate, but with those powers comes an opportunity to do that. It is something that does need to be looked at.

You need to be very aware of it to make sure there is that engagement with the public and public interest.

Q37 Mary Robinson: Professor Copus, I was interested that when you spoke about the scrutiny you said that what has been proposed may not be able to do the job required. I just wondered what sort of indicators we should be looking out for in the future that will enable us to measure whether the scrutiny has been effective.

Professor Copus: The key measure is: can you point to a demonstrable change in policy as a result of the activities of scrutiny? That is one key identifier, if you like, of effective scrutiny: has something changed as a result? In many cases in local government there are real success stories of scrutiny.

The other aspect is: what is the nature of any scrutiny inquiry? If the nature of that inquiry is a report is received, written by officers and elected members of one sort or another; that report is read and either agreed or not; and scrutiny goes away again, then that, I would argue, is pretty ineffectual. If, however, there is a review that is conducted over a period of time, much like a parliamentary Select Committee, that takes evidence from different sources, that experiences different arguments and different views, that assesses the weight of all of that and comes up to a recommendation that the mayor or the combined authority should do X, Y and Z, that again indicates a much more robust approach to the process of scrutiny. There also has to be a relationship between the chair of any scrutiny committee and the political leader, whether that is the mayor in a combined authority or anywhere else, in that it is not sufficient to simply report and give some recommendations. Something has to happen after that. The chairs of any scrutiny committee become vital in the process of pursuing those recommendations and carrying on a negotiation with the mayor. In those three areas, we could see the indicators of an effective scrutiny mechanism.

Q38 Chair: I want to move on to Bob in a moment. Just before I do, let me pick one point up. Scrutiny is certainly very important, but in terms of devolution, accountability and people being able to understand where decisions lie is very important. Just coming back to the non-met areas, apart from parish councillors, if we end up with district councillors and county councillors and an elected mayor, is that not going to confuse the public even more about who is doing what? They often now fail to understand whether it is the district or county council doing something; if

you have a mayor on top of that structure, is that going to become completely unwieldy?

Alexandra Jones: It is challenging. It depends where you are looking. You do need to have a metro mayor with very clear responsibilities that mean you understand what the mayor does. In London, I think people know broadly what the mayor does, even if they do not understand what some of the local councils do, if that makes sense. It is a challenge, but this will be part of the public education programme required around this.

Professor Copus: I do not think it is that confusing. If a member of the public approaches a district council to ask about a particular service and is told, "Sorry, that is the county" or "that is the mayor" and "this is how you make contact", in many respects that is the end of the confusion. There has to be sensible working between the constituent parts; the mayor, the counties and the districts have to be prepared to point people in the right direction.

Q39 Chair: Just a bit more confusion, which might be down as a Sheffield problem but it has become a Leeds problem as well now. You have a combined authority where some parts of the combined authority, in terms of the districts, are non-met districts, where the combined authority's main role ought to be economic development and transport—that is the Sheffield deal that has been agreed—except the non-met districts cannot join in that deal automatically because the county is the transport authority.

Alexandra Jones: That is a challenge, yes.

Chair: And it is a problem with some of the North Yorkshire districts who want to join Leeds. How do you unravel that one and sort it out, and then explain that to the public?

Professor Pike: This is this point about thinking through how it fits together and how it can work. These are almost an inevitable corollary of an ad hoc, piecemeal process where the thing just unfolds at a certain speed and trying to work through how those things could have some kind of fix or solution. Does it need some thinking through before it is done, or do you try to deal with the wrinkles when they emerge after it is done? That is an issue.

Professor Copus: What you have indicated there is the importance of the lowest tier of local government. I suspect for any issue most people will go to the most immediate authority, and that may well be their district authority. I suspect that people will go to a district

authority to ask about the sorts of complicated issues that you have raised, and it rests there to solve the confusion. That is for the individual. In terms of how we make all of that work together, it has to evolve. You are absolutely right; there has to be an evolving agenda that we solve these problems as they emerge.

Alexandra Jones: It is problematic. I know Sheffield and Leeds are struggling with issues around the districts, agreeing things with the counties, and non-contiguous boundaries. These are issues that are specific to those places, but it is not only those places. Yes, it is a problem. There is no easy solution. Government could intervene. It could be the local areas end up deciding it—that is where it is going at the moment—but there is no easy answer.

Chair: We will move on to the easy-to-solve problems now: London.

Q40 Bob Blackman: London is a quarter of the economy; it is the powerhouse of the British economy. Devolving that and changing and rebalancing is always a challenge. Could I just clarify some of the evidence we have received? Alex, in your evidence you were inferring that you did not think this Bill really referred to London and London was a different model completely. Could you just clarify that?

Alexandra Jones: My understanding is that the measures contained in the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill will not apply to London, where existing arrangements, born out of the Greater London Authority Act, are distinct and are slightly further ahead in terms of devolution than those currently found in the rest of England and Wales. We have not seen plans for additional devolution for Greater London at the moment. From the Centre for Cities perspective, we would expect that the same suite of powers available currently to Greater Manchester should be introduced for the capital, and we would like to see the recommendations of the London Finance Commission implemented as well.

Q41 Bob Blackman: We have lots of evidence from the London Finance Commission. We did a report in the last Parliament on this particular issue. Indeed, there is all sorts of other evidence saying there should be more devolution to London. Do you see that happening as part of this legislation? As you say, there is some confusion here. Should it be clarified before it goes through Parliament as to what is happening? Speaking as someone who has piloted three Private Bills on behalf of the

GLA through Parliament to get powers that would be fairly rudimentary for local authorities, it does seem that London is being dealt with unfairly.

Alexandra Jones: We think it should be gaining the same powers, and in the easiest way possible. My understanding is the Bill does not refer to London at the moment. We think that is an omission that should be rectified.

Professor Pike: Again, we have spoken earlier on about the need for more clarity in terms of the purpose, direction and timescale for these things, and clarifying London's role in relation to the Bill would be a fundamental thing to do. In doing that—giving more shape to it—there has been a long history of deals and informal arrangements in London that, because of its size, weight and importance in the UK, often has a lot of decentralisation almost under the radar and through the back door in some ways. Perhaps having a clearer, more transparent and more open process might be a better way to do things.

Professor Copus: You made the point about piloting Bills through that refer just to the GLA or just to London. In my mind, dealing with London as a separate entity is important, because of the power that it has within the country, because of the size, and because of its continual ability to spill over its own boundaries in a way that many other areas do not. It is a particular type of beast that does need to be dealt with in a separate way. That is not to say that the powers that rest within this current Bill cannot transfer over to London; many of them would be appropriate.

Q42 Bob Blackman: The GLA has just published another report suggesting further devolution of powers. I do not know if you have been able to see and read that report as yet.

Professor Copus: I have not seen that, no.

Q43 Bob Blackman: Okay. Well, that has only come out in the past few days. The other issue that I will just mention is that clearly, the Mayor of London, whoever he or she may be, has powers over transport, policing—a vast array of powers. However, for example, if you are a fare payer using London transport, travelling into London from outside the GLA area, you have no say whatsoever. You do not vote for the mayor; you do not have any control over a London authority. How should that be resolved with greater co-operation with local authorities around London? Any particular views?

Professor Pike: In some work we have been doing as part of the iBUILD infrastructure centre funded by EPSRC and ESRC we have been

looking at London currently. One of the issues about funding or financing infrastructure is the extent to which those commuters from outside London are paying for the infrastructure renewal and development within London. These are thorny issues in terms of that broader governance and the extent to which you could try—and again, I go back to the shape, the framework and the sense of how the system fits together. Like the Leeds and the Sheffield wrinkles, this is another admittedly very big wrinkle in terms of how London deals with that growing hinterland. This is something that needs to be thought through in terms of the overall process of how this decentralisation works, rather than just, perhaps, allowing it to evolve. There are better relationships between London and some of the outer counties than there are between London and others. That is probably one of the core things.

Q44 Bob Blackman: There are many London boroughs that do not believe they are in London.

Professor Pike: Sure. Yes.

Q45 Bob Blackman: Are there any other views?

Alexandra Jones: We recognise it is a big challenge. I am not sure the answer is extending the reach of the mayoralty; it is probably about making sure that you are striking some of the deals, making sure that TfL is engaging—engaging democratically, with the mayor working with the surrounding councils.

Q46 Bob Blackman: One of the suggestions that has been made is that the London Underground should extend another couple of stops out on each line, but that would immediately take it beyond London. Who pays for that?

Alexandra Jones: The payment issue is one of the biggest challenges. The fact that the London transport system is used by people travelling from a wide distance is undisputed. The fact that TfL is working with franchises around London to make sure that there is greater integration between some of the rail services and the Underground, etc. is a very positive thing. The issue comes down then to who pays. That can often be done through deals and through conversations about how you work together and what the benefits will be. It is not easy to resolve, but the fact is London's economy stretches out further and further every year. Its commuting reach stretches further every year.

Q47 Bob Blackman: Coming back to the Chair's quite valid point here, there is a democratic deficit because there are people who are needing to travel who have no say or control whatsoever in these deals done in darkened rooms.

Alexandra Jones: It is a significant challenge. The strength of London's economy means that it does keep stretching out further, so, yes, it is a challenge.

Q48 Bob Blackman: Do you have a solution to this conundrum?

Alexandra Jones: Beyond extending the Mayor of London's remit further and further each year—whether that would be effective I am not sure—making sure those deals are done not in darkened rooms is not a great solution but the best that I have at the moment.

Professor Copus: It depends on who you want to pay—whether it is the user or the taxpayer. If it is the user paying, then the infrastructure is paid for through whatever finances the London government can arrange; the user then pays and effectively pays that back, or there is a negotiation between London and the surrounding hinterlands to share the cost of transport development, or for that cost to be paid back over time, for example. What often is the solution to some of these sorts of questions is for political leaders locally to work out what will work for them—but London is difficult to constrain and unless there is that constant negotiation with the hinterland, so to speak, these problems are always going to arise. There is a real need for pressure on the political leaders to start to explore how they want to solve these problems locally.

Q49 David Mackintosh: The coalition Government put a lot of priority on the city deals. I am interested to learn how successful you think they have been and what contribution they have made to the devolution process as a whole.

Professor Pike: Deals and deal-making have become a very characteristic part of the Government's approach to decentralisation. Certainly the city deals—the first wave in particular, and the second wave as well—have been in the vanguard of this approach. Again, we have been doing a lot of work reviewing the city deals as part of this iBUILD infrastructure research centre. There are certainly pros to them. They provided a very useful connection between the local and the central level; there has been a degree of local empowerment, vision and strategy-making at the local level; some innovation has been promoted; they have encouraged programme and project integration; and they have been used as a local governance reform device.

They are more problematic in terms of the unbalanced, asymmetric relationship between the centre and the local level. The centre has had a slightly ambiguous role as somebody who has been supporting and encouraging local teams with their city deals but then also appraising and deciding on them further down the process, so the power in terms of the negotiation is a bit tilted. They have not been very transparent. They have very uneven outcomes. When you look at the resources that have been distributed on the back of the city deals, there has been a bit of slippage between when things have been announced and when they have been implemented. Again, coming back to this point about evaluation and assessment, that has been rather limited.

They have been very important. There is certainly more to come, as we have seen with the framework for devolution deals; it is certainly in the *modus operandi* of Government. We have been trying to think about how you would reform them to make them better. Here, trying to clarify the principles, the rationales and the process for deals and deal-making might help; trying to provide some options about core and bespoke elements, which they did with the wave two city deals; trying to build in maybe some independent components of appraisal and approval to try to resolve that ambiguous role of Government; certainly strengthening monitoring and assessment of delivery; and then trying to provide some surety for the local actors in terms of what has been announced and what they have to negotiate with the Government departments would be a key thing to look at.

Q50 David Mackintosh: You may have answered some of this, but what lessons do you think can be learnt from the whole city deal programme, and what do you think their role will be going forward?

Professor Pike: They are there now. Deals and deal-making are part of how this decentralisation process is working. I do not think there has been enough reflection on the pros and cons of city deals to date to really inform future practice, even though they are now being used as a framework for public policy. We could do a lot more in reflecting on and learning from that.

Q51 Alison Thewliss: Just to touch on some of the things that you said, Professor Copus, about the arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland being a model for the kinds of powers that could go to combined authorities as part of a wider devolution deal, do you feel that they do provide that model? Is there perhaps—certainly from my point of view as an SNP MP there is—a slight difference between powers granted to a nation rather than to a regional authority?

Professor Copus: This is about pushing the devolution boundaries, in some respects. The discussion we had earlier about what is driving devolution and the idea that this is possibly based on an economic and an economic-regeneration agenda that is driving the whole thing does open up possibilities for the next step—what comes beyond this phase of the devolution agenda—and also what makes the difference between decentralisation and devolution: the idea that we pass tasks, functions and responsibilities down but do we then go that step beyond and start to devolve real political power and decision-making? The examples that I was toying with are: what is really necessary to be decided at a national level, and what are the issues over which we can have a lot more discretion locally than we do? If you look at Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and you look at the nature of the devolution there and the powers that have been passed down, certainly for city regions, we are almost replicating city states in some respects. The ability to create a legislative framework and to have real power and real control over what happens in those areas is not necessarily a fantasy; it is something that operates. In any federal system, you will get that tiered approach to who legislates about what. I know we are not in a federation, but even in a unitary system, it is possible, as Scotland and Wales show, to pass down primary legislative powers. The test should be, at a national level rather than a local level: “Is this an issue over which we should have a national policy or is this an issue on which the areas and the regions within the country can differ in the way in which they deal with this?” I gave a couple of deliberately provocative examples. There is a model there, and to me it is the next logical step, otherwise this agenda starts to wither on the vine somewhat. It begins to lack a purpose once the economic aspects have been achieved.

Q52 Alison Thewliss: You have talked as well about an English parliament. Do you think that would make a sufficient difference to the make-up of local powers within England, given that the Scottish Parliament has a constituency of 5 million and an English parliament would be considerably larger?

Professor Copus: I do not think that is necessarily a problem. If you look at Belgium, for example, you see a country with three different parliaments, and one with something like 58% of the population. Population is not necessarily the issue; it is how you want your constitution to develop, and it is whether you want to tolerate an imbalanced constitutional settlement or not. There are issues that are pertinent to England as a whole for which an all-England voice is required, in much the same way that an all-Scotland and an all-Wales voice is required, and moving towards regions without that further

undermines and fragments that particular voice. I do not think the size issue is an issue. Also, what is really interesting is in some respects devolution to Scotland and Wales has also been a case study in centralisation, in terms of the relationships that those parliaments have developed with local government. If you devolve to the nations, you do not necessarily always improve the lot of local government. I accept that, but I still think it is a question about whether you want to continue to tolerate an asymmetric system.

Professor Pike: We are getting to the point where we will need a taking of stock—a sense-check—for how the UK fits together as a political-economic entity. We have got to this point now where the approach to how this is being worked through has looked at the puzzles in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, London and England but maybe not given enough attention to how it all links together in the round. Then you are into very deep and profound things about the constitution—maybe writing it down at some point; even federated-UK type discussions and debates. You are into really big, heavy-duty questions about the nature of the UK as a state then when you are into that.

Alexandra Jones: These are important constitutional questions to be discussed. Some of the things we are talking about for some of the city regions are more pragmatic—transport, strategic planning and some elements of the welfare system but not considerable and not at the scale that Scotland has. Those constitutional issues are really important and need to be discussed, as has been said; they should not prevent at the same time some of these other powers going down to city regions. It will be interesting to see in Scotland what happens with that conversation between the Scottish Parliament and the cities within it, and the kinds of powers Glasgow and Edinburgh get within a devolved nation.

Chair: Thank you all for coming and giving your evidence. That has been extremely helpful to the Committee. I am told that the transcript will be ready tomorrow morning—very quickly indeed—because the evidence session is going to be tagged as part of the Second Reading debate of the Bill, which will take place on Wednesday. Thanks very much for your evidence.