



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Pre-appointment hearing for Chair of Charity Commission, HC 509

Tuesday 20 February 2018

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Damian Collins (Chair); Julie Elliott; Paul Farrelly; Julian Knight; Ian C. Lucas; Christian Matheson; Brendan O'Hara; Rebecca Pow; Jo Stevens.

Questions 1 - 87

Witness

Baroness Stowell of Beeston, Government's preferred candidate for Chair of the Charity Commission.

Examination of witness

Baroness Stowell of Beeston.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome, Baroness Stowell, to this pre-appointment hearing for the position of the new Chair of the Charity Commission. I understand from the appointment process that the candidates were asked to give the Department a five-minute précis presentation of their vision for the role of the Chair of the Charity Commission and the work of the Commission going forward. We thought perhaps you could give us a short summary of the recommendations you made to the Department during your interview process.

Baroness Stowell: Okay. Thank you very much. I should probably start off by saying that I applied for this role because I wanted the opportunity to represent the public interest in a sector that is incredibly important and arouses very strong feelings among so many of us. More specifically, the reason why I applied and where I get to the challenge is that fall in public trust in the charity sector. I felt very much that my experience in the political world and in the corporate world was very relevant and would make me a strong candidate for this role, because I think when we look at the decline in public trust in charities the reasons behind that are very similar to what we see in the corporate world and in the political world. It is very much linked to big organisations, which, to a lot of people, often seem to be operating in the interests of the people in charge rather than those they exist to serve. Charities are not immune from this because, as I say, some of them are big businesses in effect, but also I think the public's reaction when they see failings in the charitable sector is that much stronger because their expectations of charities are so much higher.

I feel that the challenge for the Charity Commission is how it responds to this problem and whether it can do so without becoming purely adversarial in its relationship with the sector, or—to put it another way—can it both work with the sector to address this decline in public trust and, at the same time, remain sufficiently independent in order to deal with and tackle any failings it discovers? I think the answer to that question has to be yes. The statutory requirements on the Charity Commission make it clear it has to do both of those things, but more importantly, if you believe in the importance of the charity sector to the wellbeing of our country, the regulator does have to have that two-part relationship with the charity sector. My experience both as Leader of the House of Lords and through my time at the BBC, when I was working in governance and regulation, is very relevant to this.

If that is the challenge, what I would outline as the way in which, at the Charity Commission, we need to respond to that is for the Charity Commission to clarify what its purpose is. We know of course that the Charity Commission exists to protect and promote the public interest in the charity sector, but the answer to the question “Why?” has to be the



purpose that drives the Charity Commission in all of its work, both in its work in support of the sector and also in its work in regulating it.

At this point in my selection process, not having been confirmed in post and not being in there, what I would offer as an answer to that question I would not necessarily set in stone. Basically, what I am talking about is that people want a charity sector. Their interest is around the fact that it provides a lot of services that are important to people and communities here in the UK and around the world, but it also defines very much what kind of people we are. If the Charity Commission is able to be clear about its purpose and its purpose is what is driving all of its activity, then I think it can be both supportive of the sector and that the charity sector will be able to see why it needs to act robustly when it deals with failings that undermine that purpose, which is so important to the people whose interests the charity sector exists for.

Finally, I would say that in terms of responding to that problem of declining public trust in the sector, this is not something that the commission can do on its own. It has to be able to work with the charity sector. I feel that if we are able to do so in the way I have described, the Charity Commission will be even stronger in its own confidence and the way in which it conducts its work, and I hope that we would be able to generate the confidence of the sector and together see that decline in public trust start to be overturned.

Q2 Chair: Thank you for that. Can I ask why you expressly wanted to take on this role, why you have applied to be Chair of the Charity Commission? You do not have extensive experience of the sector. What is it that has attracted you to taking on this role and why do you believe you are uniquely qualified to be the new Chair?

Baroness Stowell: As I say, the Chair of the Charity Commission and the opportunity to represent the public interest is a fantastic opportunity, but for me, when I was looking at this role and considering whether to apply, where I felt my experience was very relevant was around responding to this decline in public trust in the charity sector because I do think what is behind that decline in trust is similar to what you see in the corporate world and what we experience in the political world. I felt that my experience as an outsider to this sector would be relevant and would be powerful. Clearly I do not sit here with lots of experience in the charity sector, but I would of course want to hit the ground running as far as meeting others from the charity sector and working with them. I think bringing that external perspective is a strength—not being of the sector, when it is faced with such a significant problem.

Q3 Chair: You will know that there has been criticism from the former chief executive of the Charity Commission that you are not qualified for this role because of your lack of experience there. Clearly, although you would dispute that, those concerns exist with quite senior people within the charity sector. Do you think you are going to be able to take people with you on this journey of reform that you believe the sector needs?



Baroness Stowell: I think so because I am a veteran outsider, really, and I bring to all of the challenges that I have faced a desire to work with other people and to achieve results, which, at the start of a process, people feel are not possible.

If I use the Equal Marriage Bill when I was a junior Minister a few years ago, that was something that required a lot of cross-party working. As somebody who was not a previous gay rights campaigner, Stonewall and a lot of people who had invested a lot of their time over the years on that topic were sceptical about my ability in the House of Lords to lead that Bill. By being able to bring to that a fresh perspective that was very much rooted in wanting to understand and respect people who were unsure about what we were trying to do, we not only succeeded; what we did was unify our people in the process. I think I have lots of valid experience. As I say, if you recognise the challenge that I have described, I am a very strong candidate for this role.

The other thing when you look at the criteria for the role, which I know that you have as well, experience in the charity sector was not something that was prominent in the list of criteria. Before I applied, however, I did consult some key figures within the sector because I was conscious that it was a sector that I was not that experienced in. I was advised by the people that I spoke to, who were not necessarily people I knew already in the sector, that that should not be a barrier to my application. That was why I went ahead with the application. I feel have made a strong case to the independent panel and why I sit before you today.

Q4 Chair: There is a little bit of implied criticism of the Charity Commission in what you said because of your concerns about declining public trust. Do you feel, looking at the unfolding scandals at charities like Oxfam, that the Charity Commission has failed in its oversight of major charities?

Baroness Stowell: If you look at the current horrific example that we have seen over the last few days, it is important for us to remember that this started in 2011. One of the things that I feel is good about coming into the Charity Commission at this time as Chair, if I am confirmed in post, is that I get to replace somebody, in William Shawcross, who has done an incredible job over the last five years as Chair, transforming the Charity Commission. The Charity Commission is in a much stronger place today than it was when William arrived.

Clearly, I do not want to get too drawn into the detail of the Oxfam case, but when you look at the events around 2011 and the Charity Commission's response to the report that was provided to it by Oxfam at that time—I know the Charity Commission itself has said that had they known more, they would have reacted differently—my view as an observer of the story over the last week is that it is disappointing that the Charity Commission at that time was not more curious and did not push back at Oxfam to get some more information from them. However, when you look at what they have done over the last couple of years and what they have produced over the weekend—the action plan that is now under



way in response to the events of the last few days—I think the Charity Commission is responding very strongly.

I feel that what I have outlined to you is a challenge that we need to respond to. It is about building on what progress has been made under William Shawcross, and it is only because of his work and the transformation that has already taken place in the commission that it is in a strong situation now to be able to be, I think, even more confident in addressing this concern, which we should all be concerned about. To the charities themselves, the sector and all of us in Parliament, this is a worrying thing that cannot be left unattended to.

Q5 Chair: If I could just finally ask, before bringing in other colleagues, you currently work as an independent strategic communications consultant. I think that is how you described it on your CV. Could you tell us who some of your clients are and whether that includes any clients in the charitable sector?

Baroness Stowell: I have done work as an independent consultant in the past. I am not doing any consultancy work right now and certainly if I am confirmed as the Charity Commission Chair I would not be doing any consultancy work in the future. That is not something that is currently live. When I was doing previous work, one of my clients was the NSPCC. That was a few years ago now. As I say, obviously while I was in Government I was not doing any consultancy work. That is a while ago.

Q6 Chair: Thank you. Just a note for the benefit of the record. One of the key selection criteria is, “An understanding of and interest in the charitable sector, including an awareness of the multifaceted challenges it faces resulting from the changing social and economic circumstances”. You are open to the charge that your experience does not give you that level of insight at the moment.

Baroness Stowell: If I may, Chair, I would say that the contrary is true. What I am trying to argue, and I feel very strongly about this, is that we have a problem as far as that gap between people in powerful positions and people who feel quite powerless very often. It is a gap that we see, as I say, across all different sectors. This is something that I have been working on and considering as a parliamentarian for a long time and I feel that my perspective, as somebody who is concerned and very aware and conscious of the causes of this social divide, would be very relevant to me coming into the charity sector. As I say, I have some charity sector experience but I do not sit here in front of you saying that I am the best candidate because of my charity experience. I am the best candidate, I feel, because of my other experience.

Q7 Paul Farrelly: I just want to come back to the issue of experience but before I do, in your presentation just on the future of the Charity Commission there was no reference to how you might perhaps think of beefing up, diversifying or making more effective the Board of the Charity Commission. I am just flicking through. After the current Chair goes, of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the six members of the board left, one is a City accountant, one is a City lawyer, one is a director of Christie's and one is the Private Secretary to HRH the Duchess of Cambridge. Do you have any thoughts on your priorities for the board and its composition?

Baroness Stowell: I am certainly very conscious of the critique that has been made of the board as far as its diversity and I know, of course, that that has only been exacerbated by the report that the Charity Commission published itself about charity trustees and the lack of diversity among the sector. Towards the end of this year some of my colleagues on the board would be coming up to the end of their terms. There is an opportunity later this year to introduce new people to the Board of the Charity Commission and I will clearly be very concerned to try to bring a wider range of experience.

The way in which I would look at it, clearly, as the Chair, is to make sure, as far as the composition of the board is concerned, that we have the right professional skills needed for an effective board, but I am also conscious, because of the problem that I have just outlined that we need to tackle, that we need to have a board that feels diverse to the people who look at it from outside. One of the things I hope we can achieve is a range of different backgrounds to our board membership. I am very alive to it, yes.

Q8 **Paul Farrelly:** How would you balance diversity versus effectiveness?

Baroness Stowell: What I am saying is that we need to make sure we have the right experience as far as the professional needs of the board are concerned, but in looking at that I am clear that one of the criticisms being levelled at us is that we are all London-based. It would be good to see if we could include people on the board from outside the south-east. I would like to think we could include somebody a bit younger on the board as well. I am aware of what I want to achieve, but obviously I am not there yet and I would have to liaise with DCMS, who are ultimately responsible for the appointments process.

Q9 **Paul Farrelly:** Just going back to experience, I see from your CV that for nine years you were at the BBC, firstly as Deputy Secretary, then Head of Communications and then Head of Corporate Affairs. Of course, the BBC has had its ups and downs in the past, not least with communications, but you left in 2010 and I was just flicking back to the various things that have engulfed the BBC. It seems in 2010 that it was a relative period of calm for the corporation. Mark Thompson, who we saw in New York, was still there. Why did you leave the BBC in 2010 to become a freelancer?

Baroness Stowell: I left the BBC at that time because I had been there, as you say, for about nine years and I wanted a new challenge. For me, as you may or may not know, just before the 2010 election I had considered or put myself forward to join the House of Commons, but was not successful, unlike yourselves. The reason why I wanted to go into frontline politics—and this is again back to the point that was raised



HOUSE OF COMMONS

before as far as my interest—was because I was very concerned by the way that a lot of good, decent, honest people were feeling that there was not much point in the things that they cared about anymore. The beginnings of this gap between people and power was starting to emerge.

What I felt was that, having made a decision to move on, it was time for me to look to do other things. I knew that if I wanted to pursue that interest I would not be able to remain at the BBC, because whether or not I did it in frontline politics in the House of Commons or where I ended up, in the House of Lords, I would be too restricted in terms of the things I wanted to do.

Q10 **Paul Farrelly:** Sure. Can you just remind us where you stood in 2010?

Baroness Stowell: I did not stand.

Q11 **Paul Farrelly:** You did not stand?

Baroness Stowell: I did not make it as far as being selected for a seat.

Q12 **Paul Farrelly:** Where did you try to stand?

Baroness Stowell: I was in the final for Bromsgrove.

Q13 **Paul Farrelly:** Then in September 2011, in fact, you joined the House of Lords. Could you just remind us—I do not know if you get a citation—what the reasons were for your appointment to the House of Lords? It is unusual for a Head of Corporate Affairs from the BBC to be appointed to the Lords.

Baroness Stowell: You are right; you do not get a citation as such. Certainly going into the House of Lords, I was not somebody who would fall under the heading of the nation's living expert on X, Y or Z, but the way in which I looked at the peerage that I received and the reasons for me being asked to join the House of Lords was that it was less about what I had done and more about what I could do.

Q14 **Paul Farrelly:** For political services to come?

Baroness Stowell: I did join the Front Bench and I became a Minister within six months of being in the House of Lords, although I arrived as a Back Bencher. What I mean by that is that I was somebody, I like to think, who brought a different perspective to the work of the House of Lords, which meant that I could contribute in a way that was different to some other people. Once I was invited to join the Government I was in the Government for five years. I was a Whip, I was a junior Minister and then I was Leader of the House. I like to think that I was an effective member of the Government in the House of Lords. I am now a Back Bencher and if I am successful and confirmed in post I will become an independent peer in the House of Lords.

Q15 **Paul Farrelly:** Fast-forwarding, in July 2017 you become a trustee of Crimestoppers, which is your first engagement in the charity sector in a position of responsibility. Can you describe to us the process and



timescale by which that appointment came to be made?

Baroness Stowell: That appointment came to be made because I do know Michael Ashcroft and he is the Chair and founder of Crimestoppers, as you know. Lord Ashcroft was aware that, because I was no longer in the Government, I had more time on my hands than I had had previously. I was very pleased to join the Crimestoppers board and I will be sorry that one of the things I will give up if I become Chair of the Charity Commission will be my membership of the Crimestoppers board. It has been a great experience. I am very pleased to be on the Crimestoppers board. I am very proud. It is a very important charity just coming up to its 30th anniversary.

Q16 **Paul Farrelly:** When did he approach you?

Baroness Stowell: It would have been in the spring of last year, I think.

Q17 **Paul Farrelly:** It was not an advertised post with a recruitment process such as the one you have gone through just now?

Baroness Stowell: No.

Q18 **Paul Farrelly:** No. I think other colleagues have questions on that. I just have one final question. It is not usual for organisations to write to us in this way, particularly regarding the key appointment of a regulator, but various senior representatives of voluntary organisations wrote to us last week to raise a number of concerns and ask a number of questions. One of the questions was, and this is obviously a question for the panel but I will put it to you, "What were the skills, qualifications and experience of Baroness Stowell that were considered by No. 10 to exceed those of the other candidates to such an extent that political neutrality, or perceived political neutrality, was not a core consideration?" That is a question for the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State and the panel, but what would your take on that be if you were asked that question?

Baroness Stowell: As far as political neutrality is concerned?

Q19 **Paul Farrelly:** Yes. What were your skills, qualifications and experience that led you to jump to the head of the queue, ahead of other candidates?

Baroness Stowell: What I bring to this role is an experience from nine years at the BBC, which was within the governance and regulatory aspects of the BBC and dealing very much with an internal form of regulation that required—obviously the system is different now—both working with the Board of Governors and with the BBC Trust, managing a relationship where it was necessary for the governing body to retain its independence from the rest of the organisation in order for it to challenge it when it has got things wrong, but also at the same time provide the strategic direction and support to that organisation in order for it to fulfil its public purposes and be a very effective national broadcaster. I feel that experience at the BBC is very relevant.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

My experience in particular as Leader of the House of Lords, managing very comprehensive but very complex stakeholder relationships, is also very relevant to the role of Chair of the Charity Commission and, as I have explained, I think that being an outsider and bringing an external perspective from both the corporate and the political world is very relevant to the challenges.

As far as your question of independence is concerned, what I would say, Mr Farrelly, is that I started my career as a civil servant. I was a civil servant for 10 years. I was a civil servant during that time in No. 10 when I was working for John Major. I have worked at the BBC, as I have just described. Throughout my time at the BBC I was not a member of the Conservative party until the very end, when at the very last minute I put myself forward for the candidates list. It was at the very last minute. I was completely independent and impartial at the BBC. I was required to be. I conducted myself impartially and independently.

As Leader of the House of Lords, although I, as any Leader of the House of Lords, was a member of the Prime Minister's Cabinet and a member of the Government and had a duty to represent the Government into the House of Lords, the role of the Leader of the House of Lords is also to be a broker, if you like, between the House back into Government and vice versa. In order to be an effective Leader of the House of Lords you have to have the confidence of all sides of the House and they have to believe that you are independent in the way in which you represent their interests.

I feel that as far as being independent is concerned, that is what I am all about. I made it clear when I went to the interview panel that if I was successful and confirmed in post I would immediately resign as the Party Whip and I would immediately resign my membership of the party. The reason why I wanted to make that clear to the independent party at that point was because I wanted them to know that this was a personal commitment from me and, should my application process further, if anybody within Government wanted to try to convince anybody that I could do this job and retain my whip, they were wrong and I was not going to be budged off this by anybody.

Paul Farrelly: There may be questions about the coincidence and timing of the appointment to Crimestoppers and then this application for this role, but other colleagues must come in now.

Q20 Rebecca Pow: Thank you very much and welcome, Baroness Stowell. My colleague leads me neatly to my question, which was that you only joined these two charities, the Transformation Trust and Crimestoppers, relatively recently; within six months, one of them. It has been suggested in a number of articles that have been written that this is more than a coincidence and perhaps you were lining yourself up to potentially take this job at the Charity Commission, and so had to get something on your CV to show that you had charity influence and knowledge.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Stowell: I can assure you that is completely not the case. When I was approached by Lord Ashcroft about Crimestoppers this job had not even been advertised. I did not even know it was coming up.

- Q21 **Rebecca Pow:** You might have known that because I think potentially somebody else was lined up for it and that did not quite come off, one of the options. In this appointment, the appointment has to be seen to be whiter than white. Could you categorically say that there was no influence behind the scenes whereby you might have had some knowledge that this was coming up and so you were potentially lining yourself up for it?

Baroness Stowell: Absolutely not. I saw this job advertised and I applied for it. I had already agreed and joined the board of Crimestoppers and I was already talking to Transformation Trust about joining them. For various reasons to do with people at the Transformation Trust—in terms of family reasons there—the process was rather protracted. I confirmed my formal membership of the board of the Transformation Trust at the end of December, beginning of January. I perhaps should have asked them to delay yet a bit longer just in case I was going to have to resign from their board but I did not. The two are completely unlinked.

- Q22 **Rebecca Pow:** Without that, would it be right to say that your knowledge of how charities operate, given that this is a role overseeing 168,000 charities, is very minimal?

Baroness Stowell: As I say, I do not sit here before you as somebody who is trying to present a case on the basis of my experience and knowledge of the charity sector. My application and my case are based on something else.

Rebecca Pow: I will just interrupt you because you answered that very adequately beforehand.

Baroness Stowell: The point I was going to make is that if there is another candidate who is better qualified than me and they are a better person to lead the Charity Commission at this time, then they should be sat before you today. The only reason I am here is because I want to represent the public interest in the charity sector. That is my only interest.

- Q23 **Rebecca Pow:** From your CV I do not believe you have any regulatory experience of these charities and, as I said, you will be regulating 168,000 charities. Do you not think a little more experience might be helpful?

Baroness Stowell: I have a lot of regulatory experience from my time at the BBC and I think it is relevant.

- Q24 **Rebecca Pow:** Just on the BBC note, when you were working there I think you worked for three different chairmen and you drove the full disclosure of executive pay and expenses. You must have been aware of what has come to light now at the BBC, or the Chairman previously must



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have been aware of what was boiling up, in terms of the lack of transparency that has since been unveiled. How would you answer how you dealt with that or whether you saw it coming?

Baroness Stowell: As far as the transparency is concerned at the BBC, I am a strong advocate for transparency but transparency is only ever a means to an end. What sometimes happens in organisations, and the BBC can sometimes be guilty of this, is that it unveils data without understanding the purpose of unveiling data or any kind of information, whether it is pay or anything else. If you are unveiling or going to demonstrate something that shows that you are not operating right then you have to be in a position to correct what it is that you are exposing. For instance, on pay, most recently with the BBC and the pay transparency that we have seen with on-air talent, what the BBC failed to do was recognise that once it made clear what was happening with its paid talent, then that was a problem that they needed to address.

Q25 **Rebecca Pow:** I just raise it because you are going to be in charge of some huge budgets and regulation, and maybe it is all relevant experience or not.

Finally, on your CV you said that you see yourself as a consumer champion, instinctively protecting public interest, and I just wondered whether you saw any conflict at all with your role as a director at Impellam, which I believe provides jobs for temporary staff and locums—doctors, teachers—many of which are Government posts, and we have Lord Ashcroft's involvement in this company. I just wonder whether that was a conflict at all with your championing public interest and having that kind of understanding.

Baroness Stowell: I would argue it is not a conflict. Impellam is a staffing and recruitment group of companies that is a successful company and I am on the board of directors. The reason why I wanted to join that board and I am very proud of being part of it is because I am interested in the relationship between people and jobs. It is run by a great group of people and it is doing very good work in its sector. I do not see a conflict there. If there was a conflict, of course, then that is something that I would want to ensure is properly managed.

In going into this role, there is clearly a conflict between being the regulator and sitting on the boards of charities. There is clearly a conflict between retaining the party whip and being a member of a political party. That is something I have already committed to. I think it is also of value for somebody who is the chair of an organisation to be able to work in other areas too, in the commercial world, as long as there is no conflict between those two things. I do not see one there with Impellam.

Q26 **Ian C. Lucas:** One of the first things you said to us today was that the charitable sector is incredibly important. As constituency Members of Parliament, we see that every day in our constituencies. Why then did you only get involved in it in the last nine months?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Stowell: Well, as I say, once you are a member of Government there are restrictions on what role you can play.

Ian C. Lucas: Not on charities.

Baroness Stowell: It is, actually, in the ministerial code.

Q27 **Ian C. Lucas:** You are an extremely capable person, there is no doubt at all, but what worries me is that until the last few months you have never committed to being involved with a charity. I find that extraordinary, somebody of your capability, expertise and experience, and what it says to me is that until very recently you were not committed to the charity sector.

Baroness Stowell: It is very hard for me to say—

Q28 **Ian C. Lucas:** If you thought charities were really important then you would have made a personal commitment to the charity sector. Before I was an MP, for example, I was a solicitor and I was a trustee of a homelessness charity in my local community. The type of skills I have and the type of skills that you have are very valuable to charities. They depend on volunteers surrendering their personal time to the sector. Until the last nine months you had never done that.

Baroness Stowell: I see the point that you are making. I suppose my only response to that would be that although my formal involvement with charities is or has been limited, what I am none the less very committed to and believe in very strongly is the benefit that the charity world brings and the importance of it to us as a nation. I cannot express that more strongly than I have. I would say that every job that I have done and have applied for, I have been totally 100% committed to the role that I have been given. I would be completely committed to this job. I really believe in the charity sector and I believe in its importance. I want to work in the charity sector and be a part of it because I believe in it and know how important it is to us as a country.

Ian C. Lucas: Thank you.

Q29 **Chair:** Ian has also reminded me that we should have done declarations of interest on the Members' involvements with charities at the beginning of the session. I wonder if we could quickly indicate now. I am a trustee of the Shepway Sports Trust and a director of the Step Short First World War charity in Folkestone.

Rebecca Pow: I am vice-president of the Somerset Wildlife Trust.

Paul Farrelly: I am a board member of the British German Association.

Christian Matheson: I am a trustee of a charity to raise money to provide a statue and a memorial to the Cheshire Regiment.

Jo Stevens: I am the patron of a Welsh charity that provides music therapy for people with dementia.

Ian C. Lucas: I am a patron of the Venture, which is a youth support



HOUSE OF COMMONS

charity in Wrexham, and I am also the patron of Dynamic, which assists children with learning disabilities in Wrexham.

Rebecca Pow: Chair, I am also the patron of Arts Taunton.

Chair: Brilliant. Thank you very much. It is on the record now.

Q30 **Jo Stevens:** Can I just go back to some of your answers, Baroness Stowell? You mentioned your role as trustee in Crimestoppers, Lord Ashcroft's charity, and I think you said you took up the appointment in July 2017.

Baroness Stowell: I think it was confirmed at the AGM that happened in that month, but yes.

Q31 **Jo Stevens:** Then you have also very recently—I think you said January this year—been confirmed as a trustee of the Transformation Trust.

Baroness Stowell: Yes, but my conversations with them had started back in the early summer of last year as well.

Q32 **Jo Stevens:** Okay. How did you get appointed to the Transformation Trust? How did that work? Was it advertised?

Baroness Stowell: No, that was not advertised. That was through a mutual friend of the person who is the chief executive of that charity.

Q33 **Jo Stevens:** Who is the chief executive of that charity?

Baroness Stowell: A woman called Amy Leonard.

Q34 **Jo Stevens:** Are there any political connections in those three people—you, the friend and the chief executive?

Baroness Stowell: No, not that I am aware of.

Q35 **Jo Stevens:** Okay. Thank you. During that period when you have been on those two boards, how many board meetings have you attended as a trustee in total?

Baroness Stowell: At Crimestoppers there have been, I think, two meetings. At Transformation Trust there has been an away day meeting and there was another less formal meeting to discuss a specific project.

Q36 **Jo Stevens:** Two formal trustee board meetings with Crimestoppers, no formal trustee board meetings with Transformation Trust?

Baroness Stowell: There was a formal trustee meeting. It was a day that involved a formal trustee meeting and other meetings and other discussions, a sort of strategy day.

Q37 **Jo Stevens:** Thank you. How do you think your attendance at three trustee board meetings in two small charities makes you a suitable regulator for the—I think my colleague said—168,000 charities that this job entails?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Stowell: As I have already said, what I hope to bring to this role is a wider set of knowledge and experiences. I have been involved in chairing and sitting on boards in all sorts of different organisations. As I say, as the Chair of the Charity Commission and the regulator, which exists to represent the public interest, I feel this is about me as the Chair of the Charity Commission being able to give some voice to the public interest in what it is that charities do. Clearly within the commission there is a large—albeit much smaller than it used to be—staff of professional people who exist to provide expert advice to the charities themselves. What I hope to be able to bring is a wider set of experiences and knowledge from the work I have done, mainly in the public sector but I would describe the BBC as corporate, and to use that effectively as the Chair of that organisation.

Q38 **Jo Stevens:** Obviously among those many charities there are lots of charities with international work going on. We have heard reference to Oxfam already today. Have you ever chaired an organisation that has international responsibilities?

Baroness Stowell: No, I have not chaired an organisation that has international responsibilities. I have been part of an organisation that has international responsibilities, obviously, with the BBC.

Q39 **Jo Stevens:** One of my colleagues, I think it was Ms Pow, mentioned Impellam. Can you tell us how you were appointed as a non-executive director of that company, which, I believe, is owned by Lord Ashcroft as well?

Baroness Stowell: He is a major shareholder but it is listed here in the UK. It is a plc company. Again, that was a role that was something he approached me about. It involved me meeting the chief executive but it was not a role that was advertised.

Q40 **Jo Stevens:** It was not advertised so it was not a transparent process?

Baroness Stowell: That one was not, no. Likewise, when I joined the board of ABTA that was through a headhunter but that was not advertised either.

Q41 **Jo Stevens:** Who were the headhunting company for ABTA? Can you remember who the headhunters were?

Baroness Stowell: The headhunters were called HPA Advisory. They are a small, independent headhunter.

Q42 **Jo Stevens:** Thank you. You have been in the House of Lords since 2011, seven years?

Baroness Stowell: Yes.

Jo Stevens: You said, please correct me if I have this wrong, you became part of the Government within six months of your appointment. You went from Whip to junior Minister to Leader of the House. You also



HOUSE OF COMMONS

said earlier in your evidence, when you were talking about declining public trust in the charity sector, it being similar to declining trust in the political and corporate sector. You described yourself as a veteran outsider. Surely you are not an outsider. You are part of the veteran establishment in the House of Lords from a political perspective, and from the corporate sector with your work in the BBC. How could you describe yourself as an outsider? I am really struggling to see that.

Baroness Stowell: As a former Cabinet Minister and a former Leader of the House of Lords, that is the establishment. I am not trying to say that right now I am not an outsider because of the roles I have held if, when we talk about being an outsider, we are talking about the establishment.

The point I was making was that as and when I have gone into these roles, whether it has been at the BBC or in the House of Lords, I have been somebody who has usually succeeded in those roles but started out as an outsider. If you like, when I went to work at the BBC I had little previous experience in the broadcasting industry. However, I was successful in my career at the BBC and I know I brought to my work there a perspective into the organisation that was very different from a lot of the people I worked with. I felt that made us, the teams I worked with, better at what we did. When I came into the House of Lords I was very different from a lot of people you find in the House of Lords. I felt that my contributions to debates, both as a Back-Bencher and when I became a Minister, did bring a perspective and things that made our deliberations and decisions better than they might have been had I not had the opportunity to be involved. Likewise, when I was made Leader of the House of Lords it was a rather surprising appointment to people. There was a lot of concern expressed about the status I was given at the time of my appointment. You may, or may not, remember that initially I was not given full Cabinet status. I said to the House at the time, "Judge me on how I do this job." I proved to the House that I was more than able to represent them without the full status of Cabinet. After the election, when I was elevated to full Cabinet status and we lost our majority in the House of Lords and the Conservative party was in majority in the House of Commons, it was reported that we were going to be unable to succeed in getting a full programme of legislation through the House of Lords because it was all too difficult. I disproved that prophecy as well. That is how I am an outsider.

Q43 **Jo Stevens:** I was very interested in your parliamentary record in the House of Lords. You have only mentioned the words "charity" or "charities" six times in the seven or eight years you have been there. You also said earlier in your evidence that you were very interested in the gap between people in powerful positions and the powerless, that you had worked on this as a parliamentarian and you were very conscious of the causes of this social divide.

Can I give you a few examples of your record in the House of Lords? On benefit sanctions in 2011 you said, "My concern is making sure that the conditions, the sanctions, that we set go far enough". You voted against



HOUSE OF COMMONS

every amendment to the Lobbying Act, an Act that stifled charities significantly. You voted against the Dubs amendment, and whipped your Lords colleagues to do the same. You voted against amendments to the Welfare Reform Bill in 2012, which was around the floor for disability benefits, loosening the bedroom-tax test that had been supported by Shelter, and imposition of a 12-month time limit on employment and support allowance that had been opposed by many cancer charities such as Macmillan.

How will charities feel confident, with a record like that, you are going to act in an independent manner? How can you persuade me—because I am not convinced at the moment—and how can you persuade charities that you will be truly independent with that record?

Baroness Stowell: Clearly the record you are pointing to is a record during my time in Government.

Jo Stevens: Yes, but you said charities are really important. You said, “I feel very strongly of the benefit that charities bring to the nation.”

Baroness Stowell: Yes, absolutely. What I would say so far as questioning my independence is that what I have done, nonetheless, is demonstrated independence as far as the way in which I led the Equal Marriage Bill through the House of Lords. Most of the opposition to that Bill was on my own side but I had more success in the House of Lords on that Bill than colleagues did in the House of Commons.

Also on matters to do with introducing measures within the House of Lords to help it become more reflective of the modern world. Before the 2015 election there was a private Member’s Bill put forward by Baroness Hayman to introduce greater sanctions within the House of Lords in order to create the power to expel. This was opposed initially within Government but I managed to persuade the then Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, and the Prime Minister to give Government support to that Bill. When I was co-chairing the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster I was very independent in the way in which we conducted our deliberations and reached our conclusions.

I am able to, and do, conduct myself independently when I am free to do so. When I was a member of the Government then, obviously, I accepted the collective responsibilities that come from being within Government. This is a job that is not to do with the Government. This is a job that is independent. As I have said already, for me the only interest that I will represent is the public interest.

Q44 **Jo Stevens:** My final question, can I be absolutely clear on this, when and how did you hear about the availability of this role?

Baroness Stowell: When I saw it advertised in the Cabinet Office appointments process. I subscribe to the Cabinet Office vacancy email that comes out with jobs that are available. When I saw that, that was the first time I saw this role.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q45 **Jo Stevens:** That is advertised online, isn't it?

Baroness Stowell: It is advertised on the website and, as I say, anybody is able to subscribe to the emails that provide alerts. That is where I saw it.

Jo Stevens: Thank you very much.

Q46 **Chair:** Following Jo Stevens's questions, can you not see that many people would say that for the last 20 years rather being an outsider you have actually been an insider? You worked for William Hague when he was leader of the Conservative party, alongside George Osborne, Sebastian Coe and Mike Ashcroft who was party treasurer at the time, from there to the BBC, then to the House of Lords and now before us today. You have been, as a Conservative politician, an insider for most of your career.

Baroness Stowell: The point I am trying to make is that while that is true, my pathway, if you like, throughout my career is quite different from a lot of people. I started my career as a civil servant, as a secretary. As I have moved from job to job; I was never trying to be a Member of the House of Lords, never trying to be the Leader of the House of Lords. As I said earlier, I have become an insider, as it were. However, every time I have made a step forward it has been to both my surprise and to a lot of other people's that I have been able to make that step, and that I have then been successful in doing so. That is what I mean by being an outsider.

Q47 **Julian Knight:** I have no doubt at all you have a strong record of public service. I want to bring your attention to the work of the Charity Commission and some of the challenges that will face the Charity Commission over the coming years. That is particularly in light of, obviously, the Oxfam issue. I wonder what your perception would be in terms of the compliance cases that have opened. As I understand it, in the last half year that we have records for, it is 1,131 cases. That is almost as much as for the entire 2014-15 period. There is an upward curve. There is a good chance that by the year end we could see a 30% increase in compliance cases. What is more, the amount of time it takes to close those cases is increasing to such an extent that some are taking over a year. I would like to see how, as Chair, you would drive change in that area, how you perceive the challenges that need to be met and what you think would be a success.

Baroness Stowell: As I said earlier on, I really do congratulate William Shawcross on the way in which he has driven change through the organisation during his time as Chair. While the NAO report that was published at the end of last year does still signal there is need for continuous improvement and things need to continue along that pathway, a lot has happened already.

The biggest challenge at the Charity Commission, and I think this is something you talked to William Shawcross and Helen Stephenson about



HOUSE OF COMMONS

when they were here before you at the end of last year, is around funding and resources. They have had a big reduction in their budget over the last few years, a 40% cut. It is good that - again, I congratulate William on this - just before William leaves he has been able to secure some additional funding from the Treasury, £5 million per annum, for the next few years pending a decision on a new source of funding for the Charity Commission. The proposal is for there to be an external levy on charities.

It comes back in a way to what I was saying right at the beginning: I do not want to sit here before you, hopefully walking into the organisation, with a begging bowl saying, "We definitely need more resources and what exists now is not enough." At the same time what the Charity Commission has to do as part of this continuing process of improvement, recognising that the biggest challenge is reversing that decline in public trust in the sector, is to come up with a strong strategy for reversing that decline, recognising that doing so requires us to support the charities themselves to be in a strong position to tackle some of the difficulties that have emerged. If we can together come up with a strong strategic plan and if that requires extra resources as far as people and funding is concerned then it needs to be rooted in that.

I strongly believe that for any organisation to be successful it needs to be very purpose driven and what I want to do, when it comes to looking at resources, is to start from a position of arguing for fulfilling our purpose rather than just saying we need more money. If we are worried that we are not able to fulfil our purpose and tackle that problem as I have outlined it then that is how we make a case, should there be a case for extra resources. That may include, of course, the additional funding from the levy on some of the charities.

Q48 Julian Knight: Are you not effectively joining an organisation that is really creaking at the seams? The figures are quite stark. Essentially, inquiry reports published within three months has fallen from 85% down to 65%.

Baroness Stowell: I am sorry. I did not hear the first bit of what you said.

Julian Knight: I am just saying, are you not effectively joining an organisation that is creaking at the seams? Looking at the figures they are quite stark. You have an 85% target. The target for publishing a report within three months was 85% two years ago. Now it is 65% being achieved. The number of days last year for the full year is 380 days to conclude a case. It is over a year to finish off a case on average. Apart from resources, what else can you offer in terms of meeting those challenges?

Baroness Stowell: Going into the organisation I feel that I benefit from a lot of change that has been made. What the NAO report showed at the end of last year is where more effort needs to be made. If achieving what



HOUSE OF COMMONS

is necessary requires more resources then I will have to make the case for those extra resources. But William Shawcross has successfully secured £5 million per annum extra funding now that we did not have before so I would hope very much that is something we will be able to draw on to tackle the concerns you have outlined.

Q49 Julian Knight: William Shawcross was at a previous hearing we had and I questioned him about engagement with the BAME communities, particularly in relation to charities that operate within those communities. I was wondering if you have any thoughts in terms of what is an ambition for you in reaching out much more to those communities, gaining much more data on the ground and information regarding the charities that come about through those communities.

Baroness Stowell: Within the—I am sorry, I am not sure I understand the question.

Julian Knight: If you read the transcript of the previous hearing with Mr Shawcross, I asked him about, basically, community engagement with BAME communities and he recognised, both then and privately afterwards, that it was an area where the Charity Commission perhaps needed to do much more work. I wonder, with you coming into your position potentially, whether you would agree with that. If so, how will you oversee that?

Baroness Stowell: As I say, because I start from the need for us to build a stronger relationship between the commission and the public at large, I feel that we have a task to do in order to give the public confidence that the way the sector is regulated is also effective and is probably in their interests. Then I would look very much to see what opportunities there are for the Charity Commission to engage with different parts of the community.

In the first instance I would like to establish what is already happening and what activity already takes place, whether it is through the other umbrella organisations within the sector. But as part of my effort to tackle this challenge then yes, of course, that is something I would want to do but right now I would want to know what exactly is happening.

Q50 Julian Knight: You want to scope out what is happening in terms of those particular communities but is this reflected at board level as well, to get more involvement with the BAME communities at board level?

Baroness Stowell: One of the challenges for the board of the Charity Commission that has been highlighted in the NAO report is it being clear what the role and responsibilities are for the board versus the executive. Clearly the board needs to be properly informed and also have the opportunity to engage with different parts of the sector and also charities and communities around the UK. I do not want to say at this point that this is part of my overall plan. I want to find out what is happening already among the board members and understand the relationship that exists currently between the board and the executive team.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q51 **Julie Elliott:** Looking at your CV that you put in as part of your application, the role you had in Downing Street from 1991 to 1996 is not clear, the assistant to the Prime Minister's press secretary. Is that a civil service role?

Baroness Stowell: Yes.

Q52 **Julie Elliott:** So, you were not a member of the Conservative party at that time. When did you first join the Conservative Party?

Baroness Stowell: Most recently it would have been at the very end of 2009.

Q53 **Julie Elliott:** Before that?

Baroness Stowell: Before that it was during the time I worked for William Hague.

Q54 **Julie Elliott:** You literally joined to work for William Hague and then left?

Baroness Stowell: Because I went to work at the BBC. The role I had at the BBC was working very closely with the Chairman and with the Board of Governors. With the Chairman in particular there was a need for political impartiality and to be able to demonstrate that most clearly. I felt quite strongly that if ever I was in a position where I had to advise a chairman that I thought it was appropriate for them not to be a member of a political party then I ought to be in the same position myself.

Q55 **Julie Elliott:** My colleague, Jo Stevens, outlined quite a voting record. Do you think that voting record is compatible with this role, bearing in mind charities' views across a wide range of charities of the impact of the things that happened as a result of that voting record?

Baroness Stowell: I would say to the charity sector is—if I am confirmed in post—I am coming into this role not as a member of the Conservative party, not as a member of the Government but as somebody who feels very strongly about the importance of their work and the need to demonstrate and represent the public interest in their work. That will be my focus. That will be my intention. That will be what I will do.

Q56 **Julie Elliott:** That is not what I asked. I asked if you felt that voting record and the impact of that voting record on the charity sector—that has been quite catastrophic in some areas—is compatible with this role?

Baroness Stowell: You are asking is it compatible for somebody who has been a member of the Government to be able to be the independent Chair of the Charity Commission.

Julie Elliott: You were not a member of the Government when you voted for some of those things that my colleague outlined. You were a Member of the House of Lords but I do not think you were a member of Government at all of those votes.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Stowell: What I am committed to doing most sincerely is to become an independent, non-affiliated peer in the House of Lords and during my time as Chair of the Charity Commission I would be very careful to be absolutely independent in my—

- Q57 **Julie Elliott:** You are struggling to answer whether you think it is compatible. I do not think at this stage that is a compatible voting record. That is your history. In some ways your membership of the House of Lords gives you a lot of experience and skills but it is on public record the things that you have voted on. How do you think you would gain the respect of the charity sector with that voting record? How do you think those two things will square?

Baroness Stowell: I would hope very much to be able to demonstrate to the charity sector in the way I do the job as Chair and be able to show through the things I have done in the past that I would be very committed to this role. I want to help them and work with them to be the sector that I know the British public want them to be.

- Q58 **Julie Elliott:** You said you first saw the job advertised on this bulletin that you signed up to. When did you sign up for that bulletin?

Baroness Stowell: I would imagine probably sometime in 2016 when I was no longer a Minister.

- Q59 **Julie Elliott:** Have you had any conversations with anybody in the run up to applying for this? Did anybody mention this job coming up to you from political circles?

Baroness Stowell: No.

- Q60 **Julie Elliott:** Nobody?

Baroness Stowell: No.

- Q61 **Julie Elliott:** When you applied did you speak to anybody in political circles about the fact that you were applying?

Baroness Stowell: The only person I spoke to was a civil servant within the DCMS but I did not speak to anybody politically, no.

- Q62 **Julie Elliott:** Did you speak indirectly to anybody politically about it?

Baroness Stowell: No.

- Q63 **Julie Elliott:** I come back to one of the things you said very early on about this decline in public trust and you bring an external perspective to this. Yes, there is a decline in public trust in many areas of public life and now in charities as well, but I am struggling to understand what this external perspective is because you are clearly an establishment figure. You have done some very big jobs and in many ways have a very strong record of public service. But an external perspective? I am struggling to know what you mean by that, because it does not strike me as an external perspective.



Baroness Stowell: Quite often when you are working in a place or a sector where you are faced with criticism and with challenge it is not always easy to be able to spot and understand what is driving that criticism. There is a danger often to think that the best response to that criticism is for the sector or the organisation to explain itself better and that it is a matter of better communication.

Whereas in my experience, whether it was at the BBC or within the House of Lords, I am very clear, and indeed the advice I have given to different organisations over the years, is that when you are faced with criticism or challenge it is the responsibility of yourselves to understand why that is the case, why people are angry, and to examine and explore what you need to change about yourself in order for that anger and that criticism to be addressed. When I look back on my time at the BBC, for example, I know that whether it was the way the BBC responded to, say, the Hutton Inquiry or the way the BBC responded to Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand or the way the governors reached decisions on things like BBC Jam or iPlayer, there is a lot of experience and knowledge I have that I could bring very much to this arena.

But also, as I said, I start from a position of saying that the reason why I want to do that is because I care very much about the importance of the charity sector and the importance of that to us as a nation and to us as—

Julie Elliott: I accept that is what you say.

Baroness Stowell: That is what I feel I can do.

Q64 **Julie Elliott:** You have shown nothing today in your evidence to prove to us that that is where you are with the charity sector because you have had nothing to do with the charity sector until recent months. You must be able to see how what you are saying to us and the evidence we have does not tally.

Baroness Stowell: What I am sorry to say is that if the view of the Committee is that what I am outlining as the challenge is not the challenge you think is most significant for the sector right now then I would argue maybe I would not be the best candidate. In the end, I am just a candidate. Other people have to account for their decisions as to why I am here. But my view is that the challenge that I have outlined is one that I am very qualified to assist the commission and the sector at large to address. I feel the result of that should be a much stronger charity sector and that is a good thing.

Q65 **Brendan O'Hara:** You said on a number of occasions that you were nine years at the BBC before being appointed to the House of Lords. I was at the BBC for nine years and nobody asked me to be in the House of Lords. For the record I would have said, "No". Your appointment to the House of Lords strikes me as being purely party political. Is this not just another party political appointment?



Baroness Stowell: I disagree because my application was completely outside the political process. I do not know whether it helps the Committee for me to make clear that the members of the Cabinet who are there right now are not people that I am in regular contact with. I am not somebody who socially moves in their circles. My decision to apply was very much on the basis that that was a job that was advertised. I thought it was a fantastic opportunity. I felt my experience was relevant. I applied for it and I am delighted that I am sat here before you today but my status as preferred candidate is not politically motivated.

Q66 **Brendan O'Hara:** How do you know?

Baroness Stowell: Obviously you would have to ask but I am not here because I am in some kind of cosy relationship with decision-makers on this appointment because if I am it is news to me.

Q67 **Brendan O'Hara:** Can you not see that your claim, which you made a moment ago, to be outside the political process, the perception is vastly different? You are the insider's insider. You are the political process and there is no way you can spin that to change the public perception that you are part of the political process. Perhaps that would explain why your appointment has been criticised by so many within the sector. Why do you think that should be and does that worry you?

Baroness Stowell: There have been other people who have welcomed it and, as I said to your colleagues earlier on, before I applied for the role I did consult some senior figures within the sector—who I do not know personally—to seek their views and I was not discouraged from applying because of my previous political background.

To me I just feel that, as I say, we should not put ourselves in a situation where we think that just because we have worked within the world of politics that means we cannot do other things. There is a huge value from being in the world of politics and I think that is a good thing and the test for me is in post demonstrating that politics is not my priority. My only priority is the public interest in the sector.

Q68 **Brendan O'Hara:** Does it worry you that so many people in the sector, so many members of the sector, have questioned this appointment and going forward how would you attempt to smooth that?

Baroness Stowell: What I would want to do from the beginning is to work very hard to make strong relationships with others in the sector, those from the trade associations and umbrella bodies. That will be very important to me. One of the things that I have demonstrated in previous roles is the effort that I make to build networks and to work cross-party if it has been in the House. I have chaired a Select Committee that was made up of representatives of both Houses, of all parties, and I have sought to work with them. That is my style. That is what I do.

I do not believe that it is possible to succeed by doing things alone and perhaps the reason why I did not answer Mr Knight's questions as



fulsomely as I perhaps should have done, it is so obvious to me as I go into that role I have a lot of work to do in order to build my networks and build relationships with people and that is what I will do because I can see that is an essential part of being Chair. Being Chair of an organisation requires the Chair to be able to manage very complex stakeholder relations and that is something I have done before and I will do again in this role. I would look forward to it. This is the other thing. I applied for this job with huge enthusiasm. If I am confirmed in it it is a job that I know I am going to enjoy because I really want to work with people in this sector.

Q69 **Brendan O'Hara:** You said you have no experience in this sector. You have no background.

Baroness Stowell: I have limited experience.

Q70 **Brendan O'Hara:** You have no experience in this sector. You have no background in this sector. You have said that openness and transparency are important and above all restoring public trust is the major issue. Can you honestly say that your appointment will bolster public trust?

Baroness Stowell: That is not what my appointment is all about. My appointment should, I hope—by my work with the rest of the board and with the executive at the Charity Commission, by doing what I have outlined, by bringing greater clarity to the purpose of the commission and its work, and having stronger relations with the sector—be about helping them get to a place where we are providing what services we need to in order to strengthen their own internal governance. I think that is how we build public trust.

I want to be able to provide that strategic leadership to make that happen. That is how it will happen. It will not happen because it is Tina Stowell. It will happen because I have a plan and I have a plan that I believe through past experience is proven and I want it to succeed because this is such an important sector. If you look across the public sector or the Government, the private sector, the corporate world and the third sector—the charity sector—if I get this job, at the end of my term I want the charity sector to be out front and centre before the public and private sector showing the way. We can do that.

Q71 **Christian Matheson:** Baroness Stowell, in 2013 or 2014 you remember the Government vote in favour of the Lobbying Act. Do you still believe now that charities should be seen and not heard?

Baroness Stowell: I know that the Lobbying Act attracted a lot of angst and criticism.

Christian Matheson: About 160 charities condemned it.

Baroness Stowell: As I say, I know there is a huge amount of disappointment that the recommendations that Lord Hodgson made have not been accepted by the Government. My view is that clearly it is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

important for charities to remain impartial and independent themselves but I do think it is important that they feel able to and continue to campaign to promote their own purposes and I will support them in doing that.

Charity purposes is very much what I want the charity sector to concentrate their effort on promoting. If you take Oxfam as a current example, when you look at the legal documentation for Oxfam the first thing it sets out is its charitable purpose and it says in there that it is to relieve poverty but it is also to protect the vulnerable wherever they are in the world. I want charities to take their charitable purposes as the real motivation for all the campaigning that they do and the work that they do so I do not subscribe to the view that the way the Lobbying Act is there at the moment prevents them from doing that. What I would like to do as Chair of the Charity Commission is make it clearer and help charities understand what is possible without, at the moment, any further amendment to that legislation.

Q72 Christian Matheson: A homeless charity—Shelter or St Mungo's or Crisis—should be allowed to support people who are sleeping rough on the streets but they should not be allowed to make proposals to Government to change legislation as to how to end homelessness?

Baroness Stowell: I do not think that is what the Lobbying Act prevents them from doing. As things stand now a charity is very able to campaign and lobby on the purposes that it exists to promote.

Q73 Christian Matheson: So, do you think it was wrong that Greenpeace were fined £30,000 under the terms of the Lobbying Act?

Baroness Stowell: I do not know the details of Greenpeace so I cannot comment on that.

Q74 Christian Matheson: You were interviewed in November. Is that right?

Baroness Stowell: It seems a long time ago, yes.

Q75 Christian Matheson: We were expecting a pre-appointment hearing before Christmas but that procedure was delayed and obviously the appointment was not made for nearly two months and we are now in February. What was the reason for the delay in the appointment?

Baroness Stowell: I really do not know. That is something that you would have to ask the Government about.

Q76 Christian Matheson: You did not phone up anybody in the Cabinet Office or the appointing department saying, "It's Tina here. What is the delay? When are we going to get an announcement?"

Baroness Stowell: I had the meeting with the Minister, as indeed all the candidates designated as appointable—

Q77 Christian Matheson: Which Minister was it, sorry?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Stowell: That was Tracy Crouch at the end of November, I think it was. I cannot quite remember when that was. But as far as why the Government took so long, that is something that I cannot speak for.

Q78 **Christian Matheson:** At any point was it conveyed to you that sorry, we have been delayed slightly but we will be making the announcement soon?

Baroness Stowell: I am trying to think what contacts I had about anything. I think there was some contact perhaps just before Christmas, something like that.

Q79 **Christian Matheson:** Who with?

Baroness Stowell: It was not specifically about this but I think—no, it was not about this but I would say that was just before Christmas. All I understood was they had not made a decision yet.

Q80 **Christian Matheson:** How did you understand that? Did somebody convey that to you?

Baroness Stowell: Yes, through a conversation but it was a conversation about something else.

Q81 **Christian Matheson:** Who was the conversation with?

Baroness Stowell: The purpose of this conversation was about something else but I had a conversation with Karen Bradley just before Christmas.

Q82 **Christian Matheson:** I will ask but we will see if you wish to answer. What was the conversation about, the something else?

Baroness Stowell: It was not about this.

Christian Matheson: Karen Bradley was then Secretary of State. She was then Secretary of State for DCMS.

Baroness Stowell: Yes.

Q83 **Christian Matheson:** What did she indicate to you?

Baroness Stowell: That a decision had not been made.

Q84 **Christian Matheson:** There was no reason? She did not explain why at the time? Did you have a conversation with the Prime Minister at the time when you were leaving the Government?

Baroness Stowell: I did, yes.

Q85 **Christian Matheson:** Was any indication given as to whether in leaving the Government you might be given preference or assistance find another position?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Baroness Stowell: No. I might add that was the last time I have spoken to the Prime Minister. As I say, I am not in regular contact with the Prime Minister.

Q86 **Jo Stevens:** Can I just ask a quick follow-up in relation to what Mr Matheson has just asked about so I am clear? You said that between your interview and today there was not any discussion at all about why there was a delay and about the appointment itself but then you just said, "I had a conversation with Karen Bradley before Christmas who was then DCMS Secretary of State and she told me a decision had not been made." They conflict each other—which is correct?

Baroness Stowell: The point I am making is I was not contacting anybody trying to find out what was going on or anything else. I had a conversation with Karen Bradley about something else and in the course of that I think I asked if a decision had been made about the Charity Commission job yet to which the answer was, "No".

Q87 **Jo Stevens:** When you told us first of all that there was not any discussion between your interview and now that was not correct? You did have a discussion. You had a discussion with the Secretary of State, you asked about the appointment and you were told that the decision had not been made.

Baroness Stowell: Correct.

Chair: Thank you. I think that concludes the questions from the Committee this morning. Thank you, Baroness Stowell for coming in.

Baroness Stowell: Thank you very much for your time.

Chair: The Committee now will meet in private briefly to discuss the hearing.