

Work and Pensions Committee

Oral evidence: Pre-appointment scrutiny of the Chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee, HC 971

Wednesday 9 May 2018

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Members present: [Heidi Allen](#) (Chair); [Jack Brereton](#); [Alex Burghart](#); [Ruth George](#); [Steve McCabe](#); [Chris Stephens](#).

Questions 1 - 36

Witness

[I:](#) Professor Sir Ian Diamond, Government preferred candidate for Chair of the Social Services Advisory Committee.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Sir Ian Diamond](#)

Examination of witness

Witness: Professor Sir Ian Diamond.

Chair: Good morning, thank you very much for joining us. Our beloved Chair, Frank, has broken his arm so he is not here today. I am Chair in his place. For the sake of the record, Ian, perhaps you could introduce yourself and why you are here today.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: I am Ian Diamond and I am here because I am the preferred candidate for the Chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee.

Chair: Lovely, thank you very much. We have a number of questions just probing your background and your suitability for the role. With a Scottish independence starter, Chris is going to kick off.

Q1 **Chris Stephens:** Good morning, Sir Ian. The question I am asking you is not to do with the Scottish constitution position but the Committee wanted me specifically to ask this question. One of the key criteria for the job is independence. What does independence mean to you?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: It means that when I say things they are based solely on the evidence and not in any way on the views that may be coming from any other direction. You can guarantee that what I will say will be evidence based—it will be solely that. It will be transparent and I will be able to demonstrate where that evidence comes from.

Q2 **Jack Brereton:** You said that a number of your responsibilities will cease when you become chair but how many of those will continue and how do you plan to manage that?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: That is a very good question, if I may say so. I have been intending to move, after I stepped down on 31 July from my current position as principal of the University of Aberdeen, to having a small number of non-executive positions in the main but those that fit within my own particular interests and skills.

At the moment, for example, I am deputy chair of the university's admissions system and I am there because I am a Scottish principal and there is always a Scottish principal on that board. I will step down and am being replaced by the principal of St Andrews University in that case.

I have been invited to be a chair of Edinburgh College of Further Education. I think that is very important. I am passionate about further education but I also think it links very much with this particular Committee. It does seem to me that if we are talking about bringing people in work out of in-work poverty then touching education is something we need to be thinking much more about. I will be chairing Plan International UK, which is a charity that is global and works on girls' education and humanitarian aid. I will be deputy chair of the Methodology Advisory Committee for the next census, which builds on skills that I



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have developed over many years, and that also I think impacts on this particular agenda. One of the things a census does that nothing else does is try to count everybody and so it does not in any way miss—or you aim not to miss—the most vulnerable in society.

In addition, I will be chairing the Council for Mathematical Sciences. That is a relatively small commitment but brings the whole of pure mathematics, applied mathematics, statistics and operational research in the UK together to advocate on behalf of mathematics—something that I also believe is incredibly important.

How will I make them all work? All of them together do not add up to a significant amount of time for me. As advertised, this particular position was five days per month. I suspect it will take rather more than that. If I read the 2015 review of this Committee it notes that everybody on the Committee does rather more than the advertised time. That is my experience in everything that I have done, but I have plenty of time to do that. I would note, however, that my original predecessor in this role, Sir Arthur Armitage, was allocated three days per week for this role. In its valedictory letter, the Supplementary Benefits Commission 1980 said it has benefited from having a chair for whom the majority of their time was taken on it. That is not the case now. I have been unable to find out why the time was reduced but I can assure you I have more than the time that is available and advertised to do the role.

Q3 Jack Brereton: Are you going to spend the majority of your time that you would spend on the Committee and working here in London on that?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: No, absolutely not. However I do the arithmetic I can't make five days a month be the majority of my time. While I intend to spend more than five days per month, I suspect it is not going to get to more than half my time in any way whatsoever. I will be spending a lot of time in London because that is certainly part of a number of things I am doing. I note also that this Committee is a UK Committee and I think it is going to be incredibly important to spend time in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well. In the induction work that has been beautifully put together by the secretariat for me thus far, that involves spending time in each of the devolved areas. I have made it very clear that I am not going to make one visit to them; it will be a regular visit to find out what is going on.

Q4 Jack Brereton: You mentioned that there are a number of links in terms of those other roles to the work of the Committee. I am just interested, finally, to ask, if there were any conflicts that did arise in that work, how would you manage those conflicts?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: It is an incredibly good question because to me transparency is unbelievably important. If I believed there was anywhere that I felt there was a particular conflict of interest, for me the important thing is to declare that very clearly and then, if appropriate—and I cannot at the moment think where that would be—to recuse oneself



HOUSE OF COMMONS

from the meeting. That is something that I have done, always have done, and has happened in many of the meetings that I have chaired over the years, not least because I have chaired many grant awarding panels and very often there is someone who will have a conflict of interest and they have to leave for that meeting.

The important thing is complete transparency and if in doubt declare and make it clear.

- Q5 **Chair:** Just before we come on to Alex, could I just ask you one final question on this area? The role should be, as you described well in your application, a co-ordinated team of the DWP, analysing, scrutinising, encouraging but not seeking to be in conflict—put it that way. There have certainly been times in the last year to 18 months where it has been quite in conflict and the Government have chosen to go in a different direction from the advice that came from the Committee. Should there be hot moments like that again, the other areas where you wish to stay chairing and being involved in, would it be possible for those to take a back seat for the time being if this is your priority?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: Yes, 100%. That is one of the things that I have learned over many years. I could give many examples of when there has been some kind of force majeure and then you have to be prepared to metaphorically drop everything and give the time that is available. That is precisely what I would expect to be able to do.

One of the things that I am keen on that you mentioned, Chair, in your question is team. In everything that I do I have a team so that it is important that, again, if I were to be run over by a bus somebody could take over and in the same way if something really flared up—in your words, I think they were—here in this one, then other people would be able to manage things while this was managed. That to me is about having teams, being organised and having a complete structure.

- Q6 **Chair:** This role would be your undeniable priority?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: In that situation, 100%.

- Q7 **Alex Burghart:** What do you hope to achieve in the role, above and beyond what your predecessors have done? How do you think we should hold you to account for that? In a year, two years' time, how would we know you are doing a good job?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: It is important that you do and I hope I have the privilege of coming and meeting this Committee again. I would certainly want to send my sympathy to the Chair but also to sit down with the Chair and the Vice-Chair as part of my induction and then on a regular basis.

What would I hope to achieve? For me, as I said in what I wrote to you, looking after and being aware of the most vulnerable members of our society is something that makes us as a society. I think we have come a



long way. If I may say, my mother died recently and I was going through her affairs just at the weekend and I came across my father's ration card. I found out then that I must have had a ration card. We have moved an awful long way from the 1930s, where they would have been brought up, to where we are now. Looking after the vulnerable is something that marks us as a society and for me is incredibly important.

What would I hope to achieve? It is a time of great change in social security but also a time when, in my opinion, it has almost never been more important, and where we can work to help people move out of poverty in some ways as well as supporting those for whom sadly it will not be possible to do that. If in a small way—a small way—I can use the skills that I have gained over many, many years to be able to do that then, my gosh, what a privilege it would be to chair this Committee—a Committee that I have to say is an enormously skilled one.

My predecessor has done a fantastic job. It doesn't take long reading the comparison of the 2012 and 2015 triennial reviews to see that things have moved on a long way. I would hope to build on his work in every way by taking on some of the major challenges that we face around the rollout of Universal Credit, around some of the issues, for example, with the move to devolving some of the roles to Scotland to make sure that no one falls through cracks. There are an enormous level of roles that this Committee has to achieve.

Let me be clear, however, that I am concerned that the amount of legislation to scrutinise is going to be significant over the next little while and, secondly, therefore—the 2015 report mentions that—we need to think through the independent work programme in a significant way. We may need to argue to increase that in some way. I would hope over the next short while to build very much on the work of Paul Gray and the Committee by continuing to provide scrutiny of legislation, to build on the work programme and to having very, very good relationships with people in DWP, in HMRC, people in the devolved nations and with Ministers so that—to come back to your point, Chair, about what happens when we have a bit of a debate—we can have a bit of a debate if we have a very strong relationship based on respect.

How would I finally want to be reviewed? First, through regular meetings with this Committee; secondly, formally at a macro level through the triennial review, which will look at the Committee as a whole; thirdly, I believe all members of the Committee should have an annual appraisal, which should give stakeholders the chance to operate and I would be part of that; and, fourthly, frankly if you are really on top of the role then you are listening at all times and you have a relationship with people where they can say, "Ian, it would be good if you changed this", "Ian, have you thought about this", and that is something that I am always prepared to listen to.

Q8 Alex Burghart: Thank you very much, that is really helpful. Just going



back to the point you raised about having constructive relationships with the stakeholders, those key stakeholders, what are the questions and challenges you are going to take into those early meetings?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: The first question is going to be: what do you want from the Social Security Advisory Committee? The other questions will be around what people see as challenges, what people see as issues. Let's be clear, those stakeholders—we have talked already about civil servants, about Government, about yourselves—also include many of the people, the charities in the third sector who work to support the most vulnerable in our society. We will be talking not only about legislation but about issues for people and how they can be overcome. I would be wanting to know very much what people's views were of the Committee and how it had worked in the past, and whether there were things they would like to see it change in its modis operandi.

Q9 **Alex Burghart:** You have already mentioned that in-work poverty is something you believe is particularly pertinent to the time. Is there anything else you would like to put on our radar at this stage?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: There are a number of leaders, the rollout of Universal Credit is going to be a big one. Clearly you have raised the issue, and the Scottish Government had a big debate 10 days or so ago when it raised the issue, of whether funds should go to couples or to individuals. I use that not as the example but as an example of many, many issues that I think we will find as we continue the rollout of Universal Credit that there could potentially be unintended consequences and therefore in order to make it work as it must, we need to make sure that we are on top of, if you like, the way things are happening so that people do not fall through the cracks. I have mentioned in-work poverty, I do think that is incredibly important that we understand how people go in and out of poverty and how we support them in a clear way to move forward. It is also important to continue to look at disability and some of the areas around that.

Q10 **Steve McCabe:** I was just reflecting on your observation about ration cards and I was thinking, certainly if you conjure up that image, there is a real sense of tremendous progress compared with that. What do you think the distinction is for someone being in possession of a ration card in the 1930s, 1940s or even the early 1950s and someone being in possession of a food bank voucher today?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: You are absolutely right to say it. When I talk to the kinds of charities that support people in food banks, they are pointing to significant and increasing numbers of people in our society who are needing that support. Let me be clear: I do think that we have made enormous progress in the period of my parents' lifetime, and the support through benefits that my mother received in the last 28 years of her life could not have been imagined before. Let us not pretend, in my opinion, that everything in the garden is rosy. It is not. We have large numbers of people who are in poverty. We have large numbers of people



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that we need to support out of poverty and we need to make sure, as I have said on about four occasions so far, that the people are not falling through the cracks of our system.

I am not pretending that there is not a lot to do but I do believe that we have made a lot of progress.

Q11 Chair: A lot of people find this subject quite dry: benefits and pensions do not seem to excite everybody. We have touched on a few of the areas where you believe there are challenges and areas of change. As a first point, why this policy area? Why are you interested in that?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: I apologise for this answer but it is the only answer I have: genetics. I have absolutely no idea why but since I was very young what excited me was statistics and reducing inequality. That is why I studied statistics at the London School of Economics and went to all the courses that were about reducing inequality and that were about protecting the vulnerable. I have no idea why I have always been interested in that and seen it as a guiding light for my career. I can only put it down to the fact that it was something I got in my genes from my parents.

Q12 Chair: You have talked about the rollout of Universal Credit, in-work poverty, food banks—we have just touched on those areas—are there any other big areas of social security that are your priority areas?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: There is one for me that has been touched upon and was part originally of the SSAC's work and was moved away, and that is communication. It comes back to the point that was made, and that is you cannot simply send the most vulnerable an e-mail or something like that. I think we need to really think as a society how we communicate with people in the most comprehensive way so that people get the benefits that they deserve, know how to navigate what is always going to be, however much we try to simplify it, a reasonably complex system, and have the support that they need to do so. It was dropped for a while but there was a report in 2017 about communication that the SSAC did and I think it is incredibly important.

Q13 Chair: Presumably that would be an area where you would consider the independent work programme?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: Absolutely right.

Q14 Alex Burghart: Back to your DNA, looking at data is obviously a big part of your career. Do you have a view on how the SSAC has looked at very large datasets to date, and how would you seek to exploit such large datasets in the future?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: I think that is absolutely right, because to me, as I said in my initial remarks on independence, things have to be evidence based. One of the things that attracted me to this role was



HOUSE OF COMMONS

when I read some of the reports that have been done and I was pretty impressed by the analysis that has been done.

I also recognise that DWP has some of the best analytic capacity of any Government Department and I think they do very, very good work. However, I do think there is much more that can be done and I would hope that one of the things that the SSAC does under my chairpersonship would be to advise, through the independent work programme, on the ways in which data could be used better. Particularly I am interested in the potential use of administrative data linked together because I think it is an underused resource that we have. I have to say Scotland has used linked administrative data rather better than just about anywhere else and has been able to make some really good progress. There is tremendous potential for the use of linked administrative data to help us understand the system and to understand how to do it better.

Q15 Alex Burghart: Are you familiar with the integrated data initiative in New Zealand?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: I am familiar with that but only in a very lay way, I have not studied it.

Q16 Alex Burghart: The IDI has brought together huge amounts of public data, anonymised public data, in order to allow for analyses that have not been done before, and obviously New Zealand is a jurisdiction of far fewer people and so it is a less arduous process. My question really is: would you be encouraging Government to bring together additional datasets and, if so, what are the sorts of questions you would like to ask of these combined datasets?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: The first answer is absolutely yes. I am quite attracted by some of the suggestions that are moving around the Office for National Statistics about it being a portal whereby data will be linked together in an anonymous way and therefore able to be used for research. Over the last few years I have been privileged to chair the Administrative Data Research Network approvals panel, which is how I am able to give the comment on how much has been done in Scotland.

What are the sorts of questions that you ask? The sorts of questions you can ask are about everybody in society, so you can ask about what are the educational achievements, what are the access to education, what are the numbers of jobs through, for example, HMRC records, what are the records around utilities? You can bring all those together in a way that helps you to understand the lives and therefore to improve the lives of those most in need of it, because what you are able to do obviously is to look at more than what one department does.

Q17 Alex Burghart: Presumably by bringing together housing data, family data and employment data, you can start to ask questions about intergenerational effects in a way that has not been possible previously?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: Exactly so. One has anecdotal evidence of someone in Wales talking about four generations of worklessness in the north Rhondda valley. That kind of anecdote can be brought into clear evidence that you are then able to develop and help work with DWP to develop policy.

Q18 **Ruth George:** Obviously work on social security stretches from data and analysing data but a lot of what we look at as a Committee is how legislation impacts on the reality of people's lives, particularly vulnerable people. You mention victims of domestic violence and disabled people. What is your experience of working with vulnerable people and the realities of their lives?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: I would have to say that my clearest major piece of work was I chaired the Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales for six years. What the foundation did was to fund the very smallest charities. It only funded small charities but it was also committed to funding salaries, because small charities are often run by real enthusiasts who are able to work with the most vulnerable but perhaps do not always have the infrastructure behind them to support them. Through that chairing role, I was able to meet many charities, meet many people and understand some of the issues.

I will give you one example. In about 2013—I apologise I cannot remember the exact date and I am just using your example of domestic abuse—there was a call for significant work and many small charities would not have been able to bid in the short time period. What we as a foundation did was we were able to work to provide, more or less, consultants, from people who had retired but had those skills, to work with the small charities to be able to bid for this funding. An enormous number of them were successful. I thought that was incredibly important because it was enabling small charities working with the people who most needed it to be able to continue their work in a proper way. Through that chair role I was able to meet not only many of the charities doing this great work but many of the recipients of those charities.

Q19 **Ruth George:** Thank you very much. Can you tell us a bit more about your experience then of working across Government? You mentioned some of the devolved Administrations you are keen to work with where you have worked with them in the past.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: I have been enormously privileged over the last 15 years or so to have worked right across Government. I could give very many examples but I will just give two short ones. When I was invited to be the chief executive of the Economic and Social Research Council, my observation was that it was doing fantastic things but it was not linking enough with Government in order to impact on policy. I made that one of the key foci of my work at ESRC. Over time my colleagues and I were able to develop partnerships with a whole series of Westminster Governments, as well as with Edinburgh, Belfast and Cardiff, to have really strong work, for example, on obesity, on climate change.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

That work was top social scientists working alongside Government Departments and I was privileged to be able to work across Government to do that.

The other example that I would give was in 2014 I was invited by the Welsh Government to chair a review of higher education funding. That was really interesting because it a cross-party review panel as well as having stakeholders—for example, students, universities and employers. I was able to work closely with a number of parts of the Welsh Government as well as with that panel to develop some recommendations for the funding of higher education in Wales, which I am very pleased to report were all accepted and students are about to receive the benefits of that.

Q20 Ruth George: Obviously you have been working in a very political environment, have you faced any particular challenges in that, and how have you sought to overcome them?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: There are always challenges but as I answered in one of the responses to the Chair, if you put time into building relationships and having a strong relationship based on respect, then when you disagree you realise that you are disagreeing on something, and you can have a serious discussion about something and then come to a view on the way forward. I have always found that to be a pretty significant way of moving forward.

I have had those discussions. I have disagreed with people and people have disagreed with me, but we have always remained friends and base that on respect.

Q21 Chris Stephens: I am curious, Sir Ian, how you see the role of the Advisory Committee in relation to powers being transferred. The Scottish Government's powers are perhaps slightly different from what is going to happen in Belfast and Cardiff. How the rollout of powers goes from Westminster to the Scottish Parliament in relation to social security—what would the involvement of the Committee be on that?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: It is going to be incredibly important, to be honest, over the next little while. There was clearly a very good debate in Holyrood. It is not often a Minister in any Parliament gets a standing ovation. At the same time we need to make sure that people do not fall through the cracks. The sorts of people that we were just talking about do not miss out in any way as we move that transition. I think the Committee should have, personally, a role in scrutinising the transfer, the operationalisation, with exactly that view. Is it going to work, are there any unintended consequences and is anyone going to fall through the cracks, because we need to make sure we are supporting them?

Q22 Chris Stephens: The Scottish Parliament takes different views from Westminster on some of the policies around benefits. Would that be the role of the Committee as well to scrutinise that and to make sure that no



one is falling through the cracks?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: That is a really important point because my understanding is that there will be a separate Scottish version of the Advisory Committee and it goes without saying therefore that, particularly over this transference, this Committee that we are talking about today needs to work closely with however that Committee is constituted. My own view—without in any way saying this is anything more than my own view on day minus about 60—would be that we ought probably to form a joint committee to scrutinise that. At the end of the day, we are all trying to achieve the same things.

Once things have been transferred to the Scottish Government, it is for the Scottish Government to decide how best they wish to manage things.

Q23 **Chair:** Brilliant. On the subject of making relationships and staying friends, you say in your application that you have had successful relationships with Ministers, Whitehall officials and so on. Can you give us an example of when there has perhaps been a difficulty or a difference of opinion where you have successfully navigated and maintained good productive relationships throughout?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: One of the great discussions in research over the last 15 years or so has been around something called open access, whereby the publishers have to allow people to read the academic journals without people having to pay for those journals, particularly if public money has been used to fund the research. It seems reasonable in many cases that the public should be able to read the fruits of that research.

I remember back in the 2000s there was a significant discussion about whether or not there should be open access, something that I and the research councils largely believed in, whereas the publishers lobby was taking a slightly different view because it could potentially have impacted. We had some fairly challenging discussions and we ended up coming out with a set of conclusions, which I thought were successful for everybody.

Q24 **Chair:** Was compromise part of that?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: Sure.

Q25 **Chair:** On all sides?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: Yes.

Q26 **Chair:** When you look at how the new role potentially would be, how do you anticipate building relationships and manoeuvring and finding compromise in this role?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: I do not know any other way to build relationships than to spend time talking to people and understanding how they think and what the important values are for them. That is what I would intend to do.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ultimately, one is trying to navigate through different views and trying to find a pathway, which, I hope, is not the lowest common denominator. Sometimes one needs to try to coalesce around a set of principles and try to work out how best we move towards principles. The Committee has always had a policy of consensus. That is something that I would continue to build on. It is something I have always been passionate about and normally enable but that does not mean to say that everybody walks away from every discussion feeling 100% happy.

Q27 Chair: You are talking a lot about the Committee and building that team around you, and compromise there. What about that Committee and its relationship with Government because you need to be independent and strong in this role as well.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: 100%. Let me just first start by saying I think great progress has been made. Again, if you look at the 2012 triennial report it was not particularly complimentary of the relationship between Government and the Committee. Things moved on greatly in 2015. I was quite impressed, to be honest, that when I met Baroness Buscombe she said to me that one of the earliest meetings she had had on being appointed Minister was with Paul Gray. I thought that said the relationship was good.

Again, I believe it is incredibly important that the Committee, through me but also through members of the Committee, has strong and enduring relationships with civil servants and strong and enduring relationships with Ministers and with shadow Ministers. That means that we have to be prepared to put the time in to be able to have those conversations, to be able to understand where people are coming from and always our reports or whatever we say has to be firmly based on evidence and transparency so people can see where we are coming from.

Q28 Chair: Which takes the personality out of it. It is about facts.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: Absolutely right.

Q29 Steve McCabe: Sir Ian, you have chaired a fairly impressive list of different bodies and organisation so far. What has been your biggest challenge or your toughest challenge to date as a chair?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: There have been one or two challenges that are not in the process of chairing a meeting. For example, financial challenges in organisations that were unseen and then had to be solved. That is always a challenge because when that comes about one has to work very, very hard to understand why there is a financial issue, how we are going to solve it and how we communicate that. That happened once recently in a membership organisation that I was chairing. Those are, for me, the biggest challenges. The chairing and the stakeholder engagement is just privilege, frankly.

Q30 Steve McCabe: What do you think is likely to be the biggest and the toughest challenge in chairing the SSAC?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: Other than regular meetings with this Committee?

Steve McCabe: Apart from that.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: I think that the biggest challenge is this is an enormous agenda. We cannot hide from the fact, as the Chair said, that this goes from pensions right through to child benefit. The entire life course is addressed here and we want to have an ambition for our society to be a better place for everybody than it is today. That is both an enormous challenge and a privilege and an opportunity to be able in a small way to help them.

Q31 **Ruth George:** You told us earlier that one measure of success for communication would be the extent to which the Committee was having an influence. How do you judge the Committee's influence to date?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: It is on an upward curve and you can point to a number of things that Government has taken note of. What I am not able to comment on is the extent to which Government has not changed their views and why not. That is something that as part of my induction and as part of moving forward I would want to understand. Where the Committee has made a recommendation and the Government has chosen not to take it, what are the reasons? Can we just understand why that was the case? There will be very, very good reasons why that is the case. I would submit that we need to be able to work as a Committee to minimise the number of those situations.

Q32 **Ruth George:** What action will you be taking to maximise the influence of the Committee?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: My answer to every question thus far today is linked to that. First, we have to be doing things that are relevant, providing top class, social scientific in the main but sometimes otherwise, research that provides evidence for what we say. The second point, we have to have strong relationships with all the stakeholders so that we are respected in what we say and when we say it. Thirdly, we have to communicate our results in a compelling way, which basically is saying, "Here is the evidence, here is where we are doing it, this is what you need to do and that is a very sensible thing to do".

Q33 **Ruth George:** Fair enough. Do you have a view on the use of social media as a communication tool?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: I am now going to demonstrate my age because I am too old for this, but I think it is important. It is absolutely critical that we use social media in a professional way. I am not going to claim to you under any circumstances whatsoever that I am a complete expert, or even an expert of any sort in the use of social media, I am just very clear in my mind that we need to be professional in communicating in the broadest way possible and that must include social media.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q34 **Ruth George:** I have been on the Committee since I was elected last June—I think we were set up in September. In my experience we have had very little dealings with the SSAC in the evidence that comes to us. Do you see working with this Committee as being the way to extend the influence of SSAC?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: I think it is absolutely right that you are separate from SSAC and it is absolutely right that SSAC is separate from you. Having said that, I have said on two or three occasions it is important that we have regular meetings between myself and the Chair and Deputy Chair. It is important that we are communicating well together because it seems to me there is mutual benefit for both Committees, but more importantly there is mutual benefit for the most vulnerable in our society if we do that.

Q35 **Chris Stephens:** A nice easy question, Sir Ian.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: I am incredibly nervous if someone says, "A nice easy question".

Chris Stephens: What is at the top of your reading list in preparation for the role?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: The legislation. Really understanding the legislation. I have been reading every report I can get hold of. I was given a really interesting open letter that was written in 1980 to the new SSAC that bears reading now because it says some interesting points. At the end of the day, this is an agenda where you have to read widely and from a wide range of media, and you have to be prepared to communicate and meet with people all the time.

For example, the annual report of the Citizens Advice Bureau is not a bad place to start.

Q36 **Chris Stephens:** How do you see the role of communication then? Obviously we are aware of the role of the Committee to be accountable, but how do you see that communication developing?

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: I think communication is absolutely critical. One of the things I will be doing is setting up clear policy around communication. Clearly our reports are good but we could not expect everybody to read our reports right the way through, so we need to think how we can have easily accessible short pieces, as well as social media, and I would like to see the increasing use of video because I think is something that is used particularly by younger people in a significant way. We need to think how we communicate what we do in a 21st-century way.

Chair: Lovely. Thank you very much for your time, Sir Ian.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond: It has been an enormous privilege, thank you very much.