



Liaison Committee

Uncorrected oral evidence: Review of Investigative and Scrutiny Committees

Wednesday 11 July 2018

11:20 am

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Lord McFall of Alcluith (Chairman); Earl of Courtown; Lord Foulkes of Cumnock; Baroness Garden of Frognal; Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town; Lord Lang of Monkton; Lord Low of Dalston.

Evidence Session No. 20

Heard in Public

Questions 144 – 148

Witnesses

I: Lord Clement-Jones; Baroness Corston; Lord Filkin; Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts; Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne; Baroness Pitkeathley; Lord Teverson; Baroness Tyler of Enfield.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is an uncorrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.
2. Any public use of, or reference to, the contents should make clear that neither Members nor witnesses have had the opportunity to correct the record. If in doubt as to the propriety of using the transcript, please contact the Clerk of the Committee.
3. Members and witnesses are asked to send corrections to the Clerk of the Committee within 7 days of receipt.

Examination of witnesses

Lord Clement-Jones, Baroness Corston, Lord Filkin, Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts, Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne, Baroness Pitkeathley, Lord Teverson and Baroness Tyler of Enfield.

Q144 **The Chairman:** Welcome to the second session. As Chairman, I have a challenge in keeping this to one hour. I am sure you will help me to do that. If anyone has any point with which they agree with others, mute acceptance will be accepted by me on that particular issue. We finished in the last session on the need for more member engagement. There was some suggestion that allowed Members of the House, as opposed to the Liaison Committee, to vote for final topics for ad hoc committees. On the issue of member engagement, does anyone have any comments?

Baroness Pitkeathley: It is a good thing.

The Chairman: Do you mean further member engagement?

Baroness Corston: In choosing a topic?

The Chairman: Yes.

Baroness Corston: I heard that.

The Chairman: Yes, you heard that in the last session.

Baroness Corston: I agree with my friend Lord Foulkes. There is an argument now for no Chief Whip to be present. It is not a question not of whether a topic is embarrassing to the Government or the Opposition; it is a question of whether the House thinks that it is of importance. I am sure there have been subjects in the past which a large number of Members would like to examine which have not been examined for that reason.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: Yes, I strongly support the idea of more member engagement. There are a number of ways in which it could be done: when topics are being submitted, during the initial shortlisting process and when the final decisions are being made. If I may, I would like to put the record straight from my perspective in relation to something that Baroness Deech said. As someone who put forward the proposition for one of the current ad hoc committees, which I think she described as "meaningless" and "full of hot air", she said that she contacted all the people who had put forward propositions, but she did not contact me. I like to think that that Select Committee has a lot of substance. I can think of few topics, frankly—

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: What was your topic?

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: Intergenerational fairness. I can think of few topics of more relevance in this day and age than a whole generation who feel that their prospects are not as great as their parents'. I want to put the record straight.

The Chairman: Good. That is fine. In fact, we have a Committee on intergenerational fairness. Lord Teverson.

Lord Teverson: On member engagement, the area that seems important to me is not so much the selection of subjects, although that is also important. It is more, as Baroness McIntosh said earlier, that out of the total membership of the House, only a certain number of Members are involved in Committee work. That number tend to be quite siloed in their own work, and I include myself in this.

This is a key area of the House's reputation and ability to be different from the other end, and it is really important that we engage the wider House in the work that Select Committees are doing while they are doing it, and that we find some way in which they can understand or hear about what is going on, if they wish to, and can participate more generally during the process of Committees.

Most people will know something about them; they finish their work, there is a report, but the engagement of the rest of the House is relatively small. There is real importance in this area in trying to get that engagement right the way through the process, and I think there are ways of doing that.

Lord Clement-Jones: I do not disagree. I agree in particular with the ideas which the Liaison Committee has put forward for opening up the way in which the topics are selected. However, I strongly disagree with the idea of putting it to a vote of the House, because if you do that there will, I think, be a very cautious approach to some of these ideas.

One of the great benefits of the ad hoc system is that we have had some very good new things coming forward, and particular proponents of those things have got them through this system. It is a great strength of the ad hoc system. I do not understand why a proponent cannot be the Chair of an ad hoc committee. That seems to me to cut off people at the legs. If you have a passionate supporter of a particular subject—okay, you have to judge whether they are *parti pris*—they should be allowed to chair a Select Committee if they put forward a really good idea.

Baroness Pitkeathley: I endorse that last point. It does seem to me that people put forward subjects because they feel passionate about them, and I have never understood why they cannot be included on the Committee.

The other point I was going to make was on the back of what Lord Teverson said. It is very difficult to think about how you would select the topics without thinking about the process of how Members are selected to be on the Committee. That is of huge interest, because people volunteer. However, the decisions are made not by the House but presumably by the party Whips as long as we continue to have a party balance in ad hoc committees. I do not know whether the Committee wants to look at that, but as long as you do that you are going to have to have some party involvement in the selection of people who serve on them.

The Chairman: Lord Clement-Jones, just for your information, with regard to the proposal of an open Chair, that is a convention, not a rule. It is good put that on the record.

Lord Clement-Jones: You can always break it.

The Chairman: Exactly, it is not a rule.

Lord Filkin: I agree with Lord Foulkes on the process of choosing ad hocs. There is a tendency for the usual channels to play cautious, but there is a proper process, with a one-page briefing on the purpose of an ad hoc that is developed with the proponent and put through an informed hustings with the House. The House is perfectly capable of making informed decisions about which ones they favour, setting out both purpose process and importance, but there is a tendency for the usual channels to play it safe.

Baroness Corston: Perhaps those staff should not be on the Committee.

Lord Filkin: I am talking about this Committee.

Baroness Corston: Yes, I mean that Committee.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Chairman, I would have suggested that the purpose of selecting a topic is to try to alter government policy or support and commend change. There must be an objective. My slight concern over the years I have been in the House, and I am lucky to be here, is that topics may be chosen because they are of general interest. That can almost mean anything, politically, in a sense. The purpose of selecting that particular topic concerns me.

That falls straight back on how that topic is then treated. How the report is written is a difficult subject itself. I would like to see our report writing at a significantly higher standard, because we are trying to achieve something with the report.

The Chairman: Would you also like to see a limit in words?

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: I have brought a few of the reports to remind myself, including a report I drafted for the European Parliament and for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. It reminds me of the higher quality of the report substance. The purpose and the structure of the report is much clearer, the length of the report is pre-determined, the length of the timing is pre-determined.

Here, in the House of Lords, with our very antique procedures, it seems to me that we fall into a bit of a heap in producing stuff that is barely looked at. I am constantly told by people that the substance of the report is not looked at, merely the summaries that are at the front or the back. I would like to see not just the topics examined but the ways in which the report is written, the clarity, the dictation and the language of it to be much tougher, much more rigorous and much more rules-based.

Lord Lang of Monkton: Could I feed in one or two thoughts about the

question of how topics are selected. It is important to take account of what other Select Committees are doing or are going to do and the range of their subjects. It is important to take account of what the other House is doing and not to tread on their toes. It is important to take account of legislation that is in the pipeline that may intrude before a report can be produced, et cetera. There are lots of factors that have to come into the decision.

If it is all going to be opened up and possibly going to a vote, as some has suggested, although Lord Clement-Jones is against that, popular subjects would come up that have come up again and again in the past. I recall that one of the topics that we considered had been endlessly reported on, talked about and voted on as controversial at all times under both Governments. We decided not to pursue it, because we did not think we could add anything to it. That is the sort of subject that might have been voted on had it been put to a vote, and it might not have achieved very much.

Baroness Corston: I agree.

Lord Filkin: You are absolutely right: one of the criteria has always been to try to avoid duplicating what the Commons is doing. Whatever the system, whether it is decisions by the Liaison Committee or, as I would prefer, an informed decision by the House, some good criteria may be useful, as may sieving a bit more.

I suggest that one criterion might be selecting issues that are neglected, important, long-term and that probably span departments, because that is where we have problems with government. Selecting issues like that are where we are going to bring more value, rather than repeating what has already been done.

Lord Clement-Jones: I am slightly in two minds about the selection of topic and the topicality of it. Our Committee was rather breathless in having to run quite hard to keep up with events in the artificial intelligence field. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, it was a very positive experience. We got to the finishing line before the Government. They published their sector deal and then they had to respond.

Choosing the subject is actually a bit of an art form. I do not think you can build a hard and fast rule. Artificial intelligence was highly current. It was exactly what was needed. It demonstrated the relevance of the House of Lords in policy-making.

The one area I would absolutely disagree with Baroness Nicholson about is the writing of reports. The writing of our report was superb. The quality of the input into the writing by our clerks and our policy analysts was extremely good. However, I would have loved a more exciting cover. If only we could get away from the rather dull-looking covers we have, we might get more readership. People have read it end to end. They have not just read the summary.

Lord Lang of Monkton: It was very well received by the industry.

The Chairman: I think we are still working with the 2005 template for the printed report, so we have to move on that as well.

Baroness Corston: To reply to Lord Lang, having been on the Liaison Committee myself I understand those points. What I feel strongly about is that there should be much more opportunity for what I call Back-Benchers to decide the subjects rather than the usual channels. I am not sure whether the Government Chief Whip and the Opposition Chief Whip should be members of the Committee.

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts: Chairman, are we leaving the whole question of selection of topics now? Are we about to move to something else? I would like come in briefly on that, if I could.

The Chairman: Baroness Tyler first, then you.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: I agree that it would be helpful to have more criteria when people are putting forward their initial proposals. Some of the points that Lord Lang has made are really important, such as not choosing topics which the Commons or other Committees have recently looked at. The 50 submissions that came forward this year and which I looked at were all interesting subjects. It is never going to be an easy decision. Some people, quite understandably, put in a couple of sentences. Other people put in detailed submissions of two pages-plus. That makes the job of the Liaison Committee very difficult.

I would have thought that a bit more guidance, even perhaps a bit of a template, such as which headings to cover, would be extremely helpful and would make subsequent decisions easier. I also support what Lord Clement-Jones says. I do not agree with Baroness Nicholson's comment about the quality. I think the reports are extremely well written. Certainly people I have spoken to in the sector have read the financial exclusion report right the way through. Our Committee, too, produced an easy read.

The Chairman: We simplified it.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: We had tremendous feedback from the easy-read version with lots of photos in it. I think the standard of report writing is high.

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts: I think we need criteria. We need the Liaison Committee to have the blackball ability to meet Lord Lang's point, but they would have to justify why they struck something out. For the rest of Committee, the issues go to the House to consider, a first sieve having been done by the Liaison Committee so that we are not duplicating what had been done before.

The idea that it should remain with the Liaison Committee for ever will mean there will always be a feeling, rightly or wrongly, that it played safe and that anything controversial will be put to one side. If it is done in the

open and we do not allow this to go forward because it has been looked at in the Commons or has just been done, the House can see the reasons for the Liaison Committee's decisions, and can see that it has gone through the sieve and has gone through the criteria, and it can vote on the topics that are left.

The Chairman: Okay.

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts: If I could add one other thing about finding topics, we are trying to do outreach. Baroness Pitkeathley and I were on the Citizenship and Civic Engagement Committee, and it would be interesting, as part of our outreach, to ask the schools if they would like to suggest topics to people from the House who came to speak to them—if their sixth form, say, would like to come up with some ideas.

The Chairman: Absolutely. There is an engagement element in that.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: I am what was described by one of our previous witnesses as the "idiot boy" who asks these awkward questions about follow-up to Committees. I wonder if we could have some suggestions about that. I was on the charities ad hoc committee with Baroness Pitkeathley, which was chaired expertly. There has been some follow-up where you get invited to speak at conferences and seminars and you go around talking about the work of the Committee. Are there other ways in which Committee reports could be followed up, and ought there to be some provision for reconvening Committees on occasions? I do not mean all of them, but if there is a sudden new development or new information, could the Committees be reconvened? What do you think?

The Chairman: For the record, the Chair disagrees with Lord Foulkes' self-description.

Baroness Pitkeathley: It was a great joy to serve on the Committee with Lord Foulkes, as I am sure everybody can appreciate.

There has indeed been follow-up to that particular Committee, but much of it below the radar. The Government are now about to produce a new strategy for the charitable sector, which we are expecting at any minute, and that comes almost directly from what our report said. However, very little acknowledgment has been given, although I have to say that I have taken it publicly on several occasions.

We ought to be looking very much at more formal ways of following up and checking out what has happened as a result of the report, because not only is it good for the Committees and policy but it is very good for the reputation of the House to see how we influence policy.

Lord Teverson: I do find it strange that we put in so much resource and we get such quality out of these systems, but then it seems to die. I chaired the Arctic Committee. It was a hugely important topic, there was a very good report and not a bad government response in some areas.

At the end of this process, and perhaps even at the beginning, we should have a public conference or think bigger and more broadly than we do at the moment. We should have something in the Queen Elizabeth Centre at the end of an important ad hoc committee session where we bring in much broader society. We have great authority as a House and we should use that partly to mobilise a much greater and broader interest in what we are doing. Whether after a year or later, we do need to follow these things up, otherwise they die.

As a Chair of that Committee, I feel quite guilty that I have not worked more proactively myself to do that, but you get involved in so many other things that that is the way it tends to work in the House. Given the investment and the quality of the work, we should not let these topics die. Part of the way we do this has to be public and part of it has to be in the House.

This issue of the Government coming back and the Minister giving you a response to the report is great. It might be a good response, but it might be bad and then there is a debate, but that is not enough. You need more ministerial and government involvement throughout the process, not in a hostile way but in an attempt to bring government along with you, because this is not something on which you are necessarily scrutinising government.

At the end of that process, there are loads of recommendations, but you need almost super-recommendations that you particularly pursue with government for further implementation, and there has to be more than just a ministerial response in a debate or a report at that point. There needs to be a requirement on the Government to take those super-recommendations more seriously and to be more accountable for them.

The Chairman: If I remember correctly, Lord Clement-Jones, your AI report was launched at the Royal Society.

Lord Clement-Jones: Yes, it was.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: The follow-up point is probably what I feel most strongly about, and it is based on my experience of having sat on four of the ad hoc committees and having chaired one. All the reports that were produced were very good, but the lack of follow-up has been the greatest weakness of the current system.

As chair of the former Financial Exclusion Committee, I have been active. I immediately wrote letters to all the Ministers and the stakeholders involved, I had follow-up meetings with key stakeholders such as the FCA and the Post Office, two meetings with Ministers, correspondence with members of the public, and pre-active and reactive press work, so I have done a lot of things. I have tried to get Questions and debates in the House—all the ways in which you can try to keep it on the agenda. I found it hard work, because there was absolutely no secretariat support for me on this one.

I am pleased I did it, because all of a sudden there have been some new Ministers and interests; the new Economic Secretary seems to be taking it very seriously and has set up a policy forum that will go look at all our recommendations again. Although I found the original government response very disappointing—most of us in the debate said it was pretty lacklustre—I would now say that there is much more interest. The FCA has just issued some new proposals about overdrafts and such things, which directly take forward our recommendations, so I feel that it had some impact, but we need more formal processes.

Two things could happen. First, the House ought to be able to ask Ministers to come before it and give an account of progress on an annual basis. Secondly, when the Liaison Committee is doing its follow-up work, the chair of the relevant Committee should be invited to co-opt it on for that meeting, because they have the more detailed knowledge of the report.

The Chairman: I can testify to what you have done post-Committee, because we have had a chat, but we still have an outstanding invitation from Michael Sheen, do we not?

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: We do indeed. There is a bit of work to do yet.

Lord Clement-Jones: I agree entirely with the point about a one-year regular update. In a sense, it is not fair to government simply to expect it to make a response at a particular point in time. As soon as the response is published, the responsible Minister should come before the reconvened Select Committee, which would be much more powerful in many cases than simply having a debate in the House, because in a sense the Lords Minister may not be the one who gave evidence to the Select Committee in the first place. I would very much like to see that, plus a one-year regular update.

The Liaison Committee point is also very good. We have to get away from the idea that once government has responded and the debate is over, it is job done.

Baroness Garden of Frognal: The point about linking it in with the outreach programme is fantastic. Perhaps we could ask Gina to put on the feedback forms whether the particular school groups have ideas for committees. At one stage, the education programme had a schools proposing legislation competition, which it is not running any more, but it would have both primary and secondary schools putting forward legislation.

Again, we really ought to pick up anything that makes our work more relevant to people outside, particularly schools, and go back to the outreach programme with that proposal, which could prove extremely fruitful.

Lord Filkin: On the question about follow-up, it is part of the wider question of how we ensure that there is impact from the reports, and these are skilled and expensive resources. No other organisation nowadays would think that the traditional model of producing a report and popping it on the table was how you had impact. There would be a serious communications plan right from the beginning to think about how you impact it. We have heard some excellent suggestions from the comments so far, such as building in PR from the beginning. We were superbly served on the ready for ageing Committee by bringing a PR person in right from the beginning and planning it there.

Secondly, the idea of a conference is an obvious and sensible idea and not that expensive. Thirdly, I strongly agree with the others who have spoken about having to retail it to government. I was told by one Member on my Committee, "Keep going after it", and I realised what he meant. Five years ago I met government departments and went to the Cabinet Secretary. I felt I was doing this in thin air and I was not even sure that I was meant to be doing it, yet it was enormously valuable, because, of course, they had never read the report. At least when you go and meet them face to face they will get a briefing.

Lastly, with the PAC report the Minister has to respond in person. A Minister responding to the Committee itself on a report would be a much more powerful way of getting engagement than just a debate in the House, and, of course, the 12-month follow-up.

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town: This is not to cut across the idea of getting the relevant Minister in front of your Committees, but I wonder if this is a simple thing. You will all have had debates on your reports—I have only done one of these—but the Chair of the Committee tends to introduce it in the Chamber, then all the speakers speak and the Minister comes last. If we reverse it so that the Chair of the Committee opens the debate and then the Minister and everyone else can come in, would that quite easy difference have any impact?

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts: The question is finding a vehicle that provides a consistent focus; otherwise, you depend on the ability and time of the Chair of the Committee to keep the ball rolling. It seems to me that there is a role for a follow-up committee, perhaps a sub-committee of the Liaison Committee that every six months or every year produces a report updating the House on where each of the reports has got to until that Committee says, "We've extracted all the juice from this orange. We'll drop it off".

That is done in conjunction with the Chairman of the relevant Committee, who can say, "Yes, we've made this progress", or, "No, we haven't", and the report is then made available for the House and will lead, no doubt, to questions and further inquiry. From time to time, if the Committee is very dissatisfied, it could reconstitute the original Committee and invite the Minister to give evidence. However, a structure is required to do it.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: The purpose of our discussions must be to try to make our reports more important in that sense—more valuable, more used and more effective in terms of output and what happens afterwards. Timing is very important. By that I do not only mean picking the right topic at the right moment. Our reports seem to take a very, very long time to produce indeed. The sitting of the Committee is long.

In Brussels, the sitting was a maximum of six months. That meant that the topic chosen was timely and was still timely by the time all the evidence had been heard. It also managed to compress very well Members' own decisions as to who to call and what evidence to go for, rather than almost everyone coming forward, from school children to NGOs and all the rest of it, like the great public forum that is here. It was much more focused and timely, because one did not have the time to do it. It meant that quite often very important things came out. I seriously suggest looking at the length of time the Committee sits for, the size and dimensions and way in which the report is produced. There should be a classic formula.

We do not have one, so a lot of time is taken in working out the shape and substance of the report. Surely there should be a formula. There should be a rule book which both we and the clerks have access to so that we know precisely what we are aiming for. It should then be short and sharp and hard hitting. This is surely what an ad hoc report should be.

From there, the quality of the report, whether one calls it good, bad or indifferent, is not the point. The point is what it brings, so the quality of the report brings the follow-up itself rather than needing endless extra Committees. One would find, if we did a really hard-hitting report, that the Chair, such as the Chair of the Liaison Committee or possibly of another substantial Select Committee, possibly a Commons one, could take up that topic and move ahead on it. It works very well indeed, but it must be short, sharp, precise and clear and not waste anybody's time. It is worth looking at this aspect of our reports.

Baroness Corston: On the question of timing, which Baroness Nicholson has just mentioned, we do this in a frankly baffling way. We have a summer call for evidence, which is a huge problem for charities and people in the voluntary sector, as people are on holiday. I found that when we began to sit in May. We rose, and we came back, but by January we were looking at the final report. I do not see why we cannot start in October and the call for evidence be in October. We have the session until Easter, and from Easter we agree the report and report to the House before the end of the Summer Recess. That gives the Government time.

I chaired the Select Committee on Social Mobility and the transition from school to work. We worked with small charities that found fitting all their evidence into the evidence session while people were away was really very difficult. Time was wasted by having the whole of that Summer

Recess when I was in Gloucestershire and the staff were here. It became an utterly unproductive time.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Our House is undervalued, but perhaps the sort of exercise that we are doing today could also consider the cost of the way in which we run our ad hoc committee reports at the moment. It is enormously extravagant and we need to be clear about exactly how we are spending public money. That is a very important matter with these sorts of reports.

Lord Teverson: I agree about the timing. On Baroness Garden's point about schools, we on the Arctic Committee felt that it was such an important subject of interest to schools that we had an open roundtable session with a number of schools as part of the programme. That worked pretty well, perhaps better than I thought at the time, as we had better feedback later on. It worked very well.

Coming back to Lord Clement-Jones' point earlier, we had a picture on the front of our report that our Committee clerk took in the Arctic, so you can do things.

That brings me back to the broader point, which I have written to the Committee about, that a lot is to be gained by Committee Chairs getting together more, sharing experience and understanding what works and does not work. Perhaps that happens now. Certainly a couple of years ago it did not. A lot can be learned from past experience. In a very short timescale, we go along a learning curve that is absolutely assisted by clerks and staff who have done these things before, but we do not share experience enough to the benefit of those ad hoc committees.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: I very much support Baroness Corston's point about timing. It could be rejigged very helpfully, particularly so that we do not call for oral evidence over the summer period.

Coming back to Baroness Hayter's very interesting suggestion about how debates are handled in the Chamber, I am no procedural purist, and some people may find this dreadful, but the idea that the debate is begun by the Minister, who is then held to account, is interesting. That way, the Chair and the other members of the Committee ask questions much more of the Minister, particularly with regard to the follow-up activities, rather than giving a broad account of all the work the Committee did. That could be a much more effective way of holding such debates. It would also help if they were not held as last business on a Thursday when everyone has gone home.

One of my colleagues has come in with the excellent idea that if enough cross-party members of the Committee were not satisfied with the response from Government, it should be possible for that Committee to be reconvened for a one-off session and the Minister asked to attend and be called further to account.

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts: It does need a framework to make that happen.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: Yes, it needs a framework.

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts: An individual Committee cannot do that. It requires someone to give evidence so that someone says, "Yes, you have a case. We are going to empower it".

Lord Clement-Jones: I agree with the point about the summer-period timing of evidence taking. It is absolutely ridiculous that people are expected to do that over the summer months.

I disagree with Baroness Winterbourne. I do not think we devote an extravagant amount of resource to the ad hoc committees. They should be short and sharp. One of the great things about the ad hoc committees is the comprehensive way in which they look at some of these issues. They are not Commons' reports, they are Lords' reports, and they have authority for that very reason. Short and sharp is not appropriate.

The public engagement point is very important. I hope we are going to talk about communication generally in relation to ad hoc committees. I have done about 20 meetings, two of them abroad.

The Chairman: When you mention communication, Lord Low, is that your point?

Lord Low of Dalston: No.

The Chairman: We will bring in the subject of communications after Lord Low.

Lord Clement-Jones: Having support for that would be fantastic. I am extremely lucky that our clerks were enthusiastic about helping after the ad hoc committee reported, despite the fact that it was not part of their day job. I have had a bit of support in that respect, but we need to have a much, much better approach to communication. What Lord Filkin said was absolutely right regarding a communications plan.

The Chairman: We will take that on.

Lord Filkin: There is incredible potential still for the Lords, because they play to our strengths. They involve Members more who feel enormously frustrated that they do not have a chance to get involved in the House and only speak in debates. It involves more people. It involves the world in a way that is absolutely right, and I have found that the quality of the evidence that we get in these processes is remarkably high. We should see them as incredibly cheap. Most of us give our time for love. I would strongly be in favour of a sensible progressive expansion of their numbers. We can add value here, particularly if we think more about impact and the wider changes.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: We have a partnership and association agreement document with some additional gold stars on it coming in front of the House in the shape of a White Paper. The likelihood is that it will go through, but I do not know. I cannot tell. However, if we move ahead as the White Paper and therefore what the partnership and association agreement proposes, we must recognise that we will be outside a substantial body of work that the European Parliament does on examination of issues and reports in which we are active participants. I was an active participant, Baroness Kinnock was. We have all worked extremely hard there.

Therefore, it is of massive importance that we take a really hard look at what we in this House do. It will become ever more important. We will not have both the shield and the critique of the European Parliament or the value of our input into those reports. Many of these topics will probably matter as much to us afterwards as they do today. I urge you to take my points with some seriousness.

The Chairman: We are taking every point seriously this morning.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: It is much easier just to say, "We're doing very well. Let's keep it all the same". I have 14 years of experience to offer in both Brussels and Strasbourg. I am not alone. These reports are just a few of the ones I did. They had impact.

The Chairman: Absolutely. You have spoken to me about that in our meeting.

Q145 **Lord Low of Dalston:** I want to pursue this question of timing, which a number of witnesses have addressed quite fully. There is one other aspect of it that we have not spoken about. We have received a suggestion that Committees should not necessarily be limited to one session or should not be given fixed deadlines for reporting, and that they could have a bit more flexibility to report when they consider that the time was right and have had enough time to collect the evidence that they needed, perhaps in a shorter time than is customarily allowed. I noticed Lord Clement-Jones talking about his Committee having to work at breakneck speed. Perhaps he might welcome some modification of the deadline. What do our witnesses think about that?

Lord Clement-Jones: I absolutely agree. You still need a deadline. A bit more leeway sometimes would be extremely helpful.

The Chairman: That is a good point.

Lord Filkin: We would go on for ever if we did not have a deadline. The risk with a single deadline is that sometimes we are tempted to select the topic that will fit the deadline rather than the topic that is important. We had one ridiculous topic—much too long—but we did it in nine months. A bit of flexibility when a topic would benefit from another three months could be helpful.

Baroness Pitkeathley: On the topic of timing, I understood that it had to link to the parliamentary timetable so that the work finished before the parliamentary Session had ended. If that is not true, I would be glad to know.

The Chairman: That is the case.

Baroness Pitkeathley: It has to finish before the parliamentary Session finishes. We have to bear that in mind when we think about the timing.

Lord Lang of Monkton: Just on that point, the Constitution Committee is engaged at present in a broad-ranging review of the legislative process. I think Lady Corston is on that Committee. It started when I was Chairman. It must have started nearly two years ago. It published its first stage before the last election. I think it is probably about to publish its second or even its third. I do not know. Is not doing it in a segmented way a sensible way of meeting the point? You might not be able to do that with every topic, but you can do with some.

Lord Clement-Jones: By their very nature, the ad hocs are rather more comprehensive, so slicing them up is perhaps less practical. I do not know. I certainly do not think that I would want to slice up our report in that way.

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts: We have not talked about the post-legislative scrutiny committees, which seem to me to be a totally different way of approaching things.

The Chairman: We had a session with post-legislative scrutiny before you came in. Is there any point that you want to make now?

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts: Yes. First, "scrutiny" is a bad word. Nobody knows what "scrutiny" really means. If you look at your dictionary of synonyms, you will find "analysis", "examination" and "investigation". Those are much more generally understood words than "scrutiny", which has a historical ring to it.

Secondly, there is a permanency about it. It is painting the Forth Bridge; you have to go on doing it and doing it and doing it. I think it should be dealt with and addressed in a completely separate way from the very interesting points that are being made about what are called ad hoc committees and should be called short-term committees.

The Chairman: You are tapping into the modernisation of our language. That is a big topic itself.

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts: "Ad hoc" should go in favour of "short-term".

Lord Clement-Jones: I do not like "short-term".

The Chairman: See what I mean?

Lord Clement-Jones: "Short-term" sounds terrible. It sounds even worse. What about "Specific"?

The Chairman: "Special inquiry" has been suggested. Would that find favour?

Lord Clement-Jones: Yes. "Special inquiry". I like it. Sorry, Chairman. Will we speak about communications?

The Chairman: Absolutely.

Lord Clement-Jones: Perfect.

The Chairman: I am trying to get to it. I am doing everything in an hour here. I am giving you every opportunity. You have taken that, Lord Clement-Jones, and I am delighted that you have. Lord Low, do you want to come back on anything? If not, we will go on to the subject of communication.

Q146 **Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town:** I am quite interested in communication, obviously, with my background. Is it really different from how we communicate all the work in the House of Lords? Is what you are asking, which I think is right, very different from what we as the House of Lords also ought to be communicating?

The Chairman: Your Committee certainly did very well on communication and engagement, Lord Clement-Jones. Lord Teverson, I have spoken to you about that. Take communication and engagement on board.

Lord Clement-Jones: It was down to our permanent people on the ad hoc committee to do all the social media. We did not have anybody running alongside the Committee. We did not have a communications plan to start with in the way Geoff has mentioned. We basically started a Twitter account and got that motoring. We attracted a huge number of followers. Therefore, we obtained some traction while this was all happening. That was down to our clerks; it was not down to the communications team.

When it came to the report, we had to brief the communications team. Our clerks had to write the press release, in effect. If you are the press officer and you suddenly arrive and have to acquaint yourself with nine months of AI inquiry, you are at a disadvantage. I like Lord Forsyth's model: have somebody dedicated to it during the time the ad hoc committee is meeting.

The Chairman: Just to be clear, I had a member of the communications team in yesterday. He was quite upset at the comments. Keep in mind the lack of staff on that.

Lord Clement-Jones: Absolutely.

The Chairman: The need for staff and resources is hugely important when we go to that particular issue.

Lord Clement-Jones: They did a fantastic job within the confines.

The Chairman: That is fine. Lord Filkin.

Lord Filkin: I do not think there can be a common template for communications plans. You would want to ask proponents of a committee their ideas on promoting engagement and the impact of the report. The job is not just producing a report; it is trying to ensure that it is listened to and responded to. Asking the press department to come in six months before publication was simple for us. They were superb. They thought of ideas such as a prepublication launch of data, which had a *Guardian* full-page spread. People thought it was the report. If you build that in, it is part of a process. It is not just PR.

There is also a need to think about who you are trying to influence; you may not know that until you are half way through the inquiry. There should be some sort of process in the Committee of thinking, "Are we clearer now about who we want to influence about what? How will we go about doing that? What are the mechanisms for doing it?" You cannot do that when you have finished that report. It is too late.

The Chairman: We had a session with the committee Chairs of the investigative committees. That came up very, very strongly. Lord Gilbert has taken that away and he is doing a report on communications engagement for us on the basis of that. It is very much alive. Lord Teverson, you wanted to talk about that engagement.

Lord Teverson: I think most of it has been said. I think we were one of the first Committees to have a separate Twitter account. That really started the ball rolling. That worked really well.

A number of these ad hoc committees, such as my own, have quite an international spread. We tend to think that the House of Lords deals with only the UK, but I think that our international profile in some of these Committees is really important. That should be included very strongly in our media thinking, as it helps to build up and feed back into the reputation of the House.

The Chairman: In discussing social media, evidence from others has been that we need to look at those methods of communication as well. One witness remarked that one gets new magazines not in printed form but on the internet itself. We must be alive to that.

Lord Teverson: Absolutely.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: As Chair of an ad hoc committee, I had an excellent experience with the communications team. I requested, and they set up immediately, a press conference on our report. It gained a great deal of interest, including international interest, quite a lot of press coverage and media coverage. They also made a video and various bits and pieces. I can only praise them for what they did.

The interest in the report was large, so I suggested to colleagues, and they agreed, that we set up an APPG to continue following the substance of what we had been saying. That APPG is running—it is bicameral, of course—and has already produced one report. There is another report coming up.

In addition, the communications outflow was very good. We had a number of articles following on from and related to the Lords' report. I have only praise for the communications team. They were very active and very helpful and did everything they could to help.

Baroness Pitkeathley: I endorse the point about beginning the communication plan early. It should not be dependent on a member of the Committee knowing about Twitter, because not everybody will. You have to have some kind of formal structure for getting that into it.

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town: May I ask about internal communications? I wonder how many other Members of this House know about the work you did when you chaired a Committee. When your reports come out, they are hardly mentioned in our own communications.

Lord Teverson: That is the point I was making at the beginning of this session. We need to involve Members of the House and raise the profile of these reports a lot more. They are subjects that most of us in the political and international sphere are interested in. During and at the end of the process, there should perhaps be an opportunity for Chairs, perhaps in a meeting like this, to present their own reports only to Members to begin with. There are still a number of reports that I still mean to read but have not read yet. It is about making access easier.

The Chairman: Communications with Members is enormously important. We will take that point on.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: I very, very strongly support what Lord Teverson said there. The idea that we might do internal briefings or seminars for all interested Members of the House is absolutely excellent.

Internal communications are quite difficult. The only way I have found it possible is to get PQs and QSDs on subject matter relevant to the report included, which gives an additional opportunity to talk about it generally to a wider audience. I have also tried to send regular update notes to the former members of the Committee so that they are up to date with the various follow-up activity that I have done, because I have done three or four of these now. It allows them to stay up to date, and it can then spread into their wider networks.

Lord Clement-Jones: It is worth mentioning that *The House* magazine is not a bad way of getting information across, if one can tie it in with the publication of the report. You were kind enough to put us in *The Red Box*, Chair.

The Chairman: Not in a box, in *The Red Box*.

Lord Clement-Jones: In a box in *The Red Box*.

The Chairman: *Red Benches*.

Lord Clement-Jones: *Red Benches*. That is what it is called, not *The Red Box*.

Lord Teverson: We look at these monitors all the time. There is continual round of them on what is going on today, which is important, but it does not need to happen all the time. I do not see why we do not have much more interesting information and bulletins on things like this on the monitors.

Lord Clement-Jones: And we have all done videos.

The Chairman: When I took up the post, I wanted information screens to be established at the Peers' entrance, the line of route and in the Library. About two years later, we are still working on that. I semi-regularly go back and ask for a progress report. Things move slowly here. I am going to keep trying.

Q147 **Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** Moving on to another topic, a comment has led staff to worry about the cost. This is the most important part of Parliament. As Philippa knows, I keep saying that we spend too much money holding the building together on ceremonies and things like that, rather than on the crucial work. Can I reassure you that the staff do a brilliant job in their scoping notes for the Liaison Committee; they come to people and produce notes for us?

The Chairman: Absolutely.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Otherwise, it would be much more difficult to choose topics. I wonder, since we have eight very experienced Members here, if we could go a bit beyond the topic of ad hoc committees. It was suggested, for example, that when people say "Let's have a public inquiry" on a current topic that would be far too expensive and far too inappropriate to have one on that there might be a small inquiry, either a Lords inquiry or a joint Commons-Lords inquiry, into that particular topic.

Another suggestion was that this Liaison Committee might set up sub-committees or that this Liaison Committee might do some of the follow-up to your ad hoc committees. There are a lot of suggestions like that.

Can you go a little beyond thinking about what you did in the follow-up to your ad hoc committees and maybe make any additional suggestions?

Lord Low of Dalston: To come in on the back of that, Chairman, we have received a suggestion that rather than Committees being established by the House, we might have a structure of permanent standing committees, which should be able to appoint sub-committees where they saw the need to carry out a more specific or focused inquiry. They would be in a better position to know where a focused inquiry was

required and was most appropriate.

The Chairman: We are looking at the structure. To date, we have had over 50 submissions for individual Committees. They are all worthy. We are not going to have 50 Committees. How do we have a thematic approach to this? How do we have flexibility for Committees? How can we have Committees that look at long-term public policy issues and can react to live issues and short-term issues and engage Members? That is an issue that we all have to take very seriously. Otherwise, as with the ad hocs, we have 35 submissions but we have to choose three, and many people will be disappointed.

In doing that, we in our Committees have to engage in continuous professional development. The communication strategy that Lord Filkin mentioned earlier is a very important part of that.

Lord Clement-Jones: Some of the answer, if I may say so, is not to do what the Commons is doing. That is what worries me about having permanent Committees. They are very clearly delineated. They have their own structures and their own inquiries. We need to be more fleet of foot. Although it is a burden on the Liaison Committee, I personally feel, perhaps because I have been the beneficiary of the system, that the ad hoc system enables us to react quite quickly to topics coming over the horizon and to do them in a more comprehensive way than a Commons Committee. I still think that the decision should ultimately lie here.

The Chairman: We are engaging with the Commons. For your information, we have had Sarah Wollaston, the Chair of the Liaison Committee, and Frank Field giving their evidence. We are looking at a dual theme.

First, parliamentary scrutiny, not just House of Lords and House of Commons, will have implications for the website. We should have a common framework for that. The second issue is the complementarity element, so that we are not following the Commons but are complementing what they do. From talking to Chairs of Committees in the Commons, I know that there are areas in their Committees that they cannot look at there but they realise that there is an expertise and a skill here.

The House of Commons has already produced a report about guesting. Frank Field said to me, and it was a matter of record, that when he was looking at the pensions issue, Carillion and corporate governance he valued guesting from some Members of the House of Lords on his Committee for a certain amount of time. We are looking at that closer engagement.

Lord Clement-Jones: Very good.

The Chairman: It is a very important point.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: On the specific point that Lord Low raised, if you have had a chance to look at my written evidence you will know that

I take a slightly different view. I would be in favour of there being a small number—maybe six—of very broad-based thematic cross-cutting Committees, in no way trying to mirror the departmental structure in the Commons, that had a standing permanent presence.

Within them, there could be a series of individual inquiries more like those of the ad hoc committees, the great benefit being that, rather than disbanding them, the body of knowledge they build up is kept and there is a secretary who keeps it. Of the four that I have served on and the fifth one I have just become a member of, all could very usefully have sat within a broad social policy arena. There would have been real benefit from that.

I would like to have both the more coherent thematic structure as well as the ability to do these quick, fleet-of-foot inquiries. I was very taken with the suggestion from one of your witnesses in a previous session that you could do something really topical and controversial, to take the point about not always being safe. The example given was the medical use of cannabis. If we could get in quickly and do something like that fleet of foot, we could start to look a lot more relevant to the public. That is a big issue.

Lord Clement-Jones: Good point.

Lord Filkin: To answer your general question first, I think having criteria will help. I would hope that you would push the envelope, as three a year seems vastly insufficient, given the potential resource of the House of Lords and its ability to make more of an impact on these issues. It will obviously cost more money. The question of impact will also cost more money, because you have to think about how you have follow-through.

Most of that is putting the responsibility back on to the Chair of the relevant Committee to make the case for how they will make impact. That should be part of the criteria when you are making decisions. It is legitimate to have criteria regarding whether it looks as if a person has thought through what it is for, who they will persuade and how they will do so.

Topicality is the most difficult issue. I remember when we were looking at the reform of working practices that it was incredibly difficult even to determine a topic of debate. You may need to reserve some sort of resource in a different track for things that are set up very quickly indeed. You are right that if we are always seen to be debating only long-term issues or yesterday's issues, we look a bit off the pace.

The Chairman: The resources element is hugely important. It has to be kept in mind that we have much more limited staff numbers here than in the House of Commons. How do we deploy them? Rather than disappoint ourselves with our ambitions, we have to have a zero-budget approach to our resources and ask what amount of money we have and how we best deploy it. That aspect is really important. The staff do a wonderful job in the circumstances that we have here.

Baroness Corston: The selection of Members is a challenge. The Whips ought to make sure that people have some idea of what the Committee is about. I say this, because somebody on my Committee wanted to pursue endlessly family life for early-years children. Obviously, that could not be fitted in to an inquiry into social mobility and the transition from school to work. For some of the time, I was firefighting. There should be some attempt to appraise people of the remit of the Committee.

The Government should see these reports as an opportunity to convene an independent cross-party panel of Members to take a thorough look at something and to be part of any policy-formulation process. Some of the recommendations from my Committee ended up, although unacknowledged—I do not care about that—in legislation. I feel too often that these Committees are treated as a nuisance. My Committee debate was on 21 December. Although a few of us were there, it gave me an indication of the estimation of the work that we had done.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: I have three very quick points. We may have a contradiction in terms on this side of the table. On the one hand, we are saying that we do not want anything short or sharp. On the other hand, we are saying that we want a quick reaction and quick response to important issues. I suggest going down the middle and having a new form of short report for high-emergency issues. Of course, they are debated in the House, but that is not the same as having a Committee look at it. That might be worth looking at. It would be inexpensive and quick but with a formula, with only a certain number of witnesses and a speedy reaction to something that is necessarily quick.

Secondly, when one looks at expense, it is not just our expense here; it is the expense of all the outsiders we bring in, which makes me also think how important it is that our reports should be high-quality.

The final point is that soon—from next 21 March or whenever it is—the reports will be matched in a sense against the reports that are part of the European Parliament and that we are not part of. We are coming out of the European Parliament and we will have no input. We are probably looking at the same or pretty nearly the same topics, and the quality and capacity of what we are doing here must move upstairs a bit.

Q148 **The Chairman:** Lastly, I would say that my post is to assist Members as much as possible. That is a big part of it. Anything we can do to help you, whether in *Red Benches* or emphasising anything for you, I see that as very important. I have had one-to-ones with most of you on issues and I see the work that you are doing as really important there.

The last question I will ask is: what should the aims and objectives of Committee work be? That is a big topic. Could you give us a snappy phrase?

Baroness Pitkeathley: Influencing policy.

Lord Clement-Jones: That is really succinct. I also think it is about challenging government.

The Chairman: Through engagement?

Lord Clement-Jones: Public engagement.

The Chairman: Exactly.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Bringing out things that others are not bringing out, uncovering or valuing as they might be valued. It is about judgment.

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts: Giving a voice to the small battalions.

Lord Teverson: In a qualitative sense, it is about giving full consideration to something. It is about doing so in-depth and having quality, gravitas and credibility. In its output it is about—

Lord Filkin: Authority.

Lord Teverson: Authority, yes. That is probably the word I am searching for.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: It is about public engagement, dissemination and leading to change in legislation.

The Chairman: Good law.

Lord Low of Dalston: At the risk of leaping across the table and providing an answer rather than a question, can I pick up what Baroness Pitkeathley said about the role of a Committee being to implement policy?

Baroness Pitkeathley: Influence.

Lord Low of Dalston: I beg your pardon. I misheard. I was going to say influence.

The Chairman: When Lord Boswell of Aynho came before us, he said that one of his aims was to make the weather publicly, which I thought was quite a good phrase. I know you are all interested in that. We have all been on our best behaviour, because we have two minutes to go on that. Thanks very much. Come back to us on any of the issues that you think have not been dealt or anything new that comes up. We would be delighted to hear from you. It was an excellent session this morning.