Liaison Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Review of Investigative and Scrutiny Committees

Wednesday 20 June 2018
10.40 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; Lord Williams of Elvel.

Evidence Session No. 13 Heard in Public Questions 92 - 99

Witnesses

I: Lord Lisvane KCB DL and Rt Hon Lord Blunkett.
Examination of witnesses

Lord Lisvane and Lord Blunkett.

Q92 The Chairman: Good morning, you are very welcome indeed. David, you sent a very good submission, as did Lord Lisvane. Do you want to introduce your submission before we get into other questions?

Lord Blunkett: I will do a very brief sort of Second Reading. There are people in the House of Lords, and undoubtedly members of this Committee, who feel that the world thinks about the House of Lords and its activities as secondary. All our institutions are under scrutiny as they have never been before, and with the major constitutional upheaval we are in the throes of at the moment I believe it is more important than ever that the House of Lords should review its procedures and activities. I strongly welcome your initiative in taking this forward and the possibility of reviewing what will be in front of us in the decade to come.

The restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster should be accompanied by democratic renewal. If the Committee felt it appropriate, it could look at what will happen at the time of restoration and renewal and the return of the Lords to the building, which I hope happens in my lifetime, not least because I hope to live to be able to come back in, and to do so with a view to how the world will look then technologically, so that in our outreach we can touch people, areas of the country and activities that we touch only in a more traditional, analogue way at the moment. It would include new ways of reaching people so that they could respond to our committee work and the work of the House as a whole. I know we are online and people in the regions and nations can, if they wish, communicate with us, but there could be entirely new ways for them to do so through our education and outreach services. That is the context to which I referred in my brief submission.

I also touched on the importance of the way committee work is followed up. I have limited experience. As you know, I have been in the House only since 2015, so I bow to the much greater experience and knowledge of other people; I never used to but I do now. That should not stop us taking a look, as others do, from outside, and asking how we can do what we do better.

I will not go into this at length, because my colleague will do that. How can we join up with the work of the Select Committees in the Commons? How can we develop the excellent work that takes place in Joint Committees, such as the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the ISC? How can we ensure that when we take evidence and produce reports we are clear as to what the intention is and what we expect to happen, and that we follow it through, with ad hoc committees, on which I have served, having the opportunity to re-form, where that is possible, and review, perhaps after a year or 18 months, whether anything has happened, and hold the Government to account as to whether they have taken any notice whatsoever? I am in danger of going through the whole of my evidence, so I will stop there.
The Chairman: That is very helpful. Lord Lisvane, there is admirable brevity and modesty to your submission, but you have done a lot more than is in your submission, particularly during your many years in the House of Commons and in the Shifting the Balance report. We have already looked at the point you made about scrutiny. There is a view that scrutiny should be parliamentary, not just House of Lords or House of Commons scrutiny. There is also the issue of complementarity, which I think you mentioned, so we have taken that on board. With that in mind, what initial comments do you have for us?

Lord Lisvane: Thank you very much, Lord Chairman. I absolutely endorse everything Lord Blunkett says. Your inquiry is extremely welcome and timely.

I have a certain amount of form on restoration and renewal, as, together with my former opposite number, Sir David Beamish, I commissioned the original condition survey from which everything else followed. One of the things in my mind was how it would affect and change parliamentary culture if both Houses moved out for a period of time. How will the Houses be different when they come back? What different expectations will they have? That is a dimension that, at the moment, is completely unknowable, but it is not one to be ignored.

More generally, Lords Select Committees have the opportunity of reaping all the advantages of good Select Committees anywhere, whether in the Lords or the Commons. Consensual and dispassionate evidence-based investigation of a policy area, or examination of a Bill or a draft Bill, is really important. I am a bit obsessive about draft Bills, as we may explore a little later. A key attribute, which touches on what Lord Blunkett said, is that, unlike many other types of parliamentary proceeding, Select Committees allow direct access to the parliamentary process. People outside can engage with what committees are doing. Of course, we cannot ignore the usual suspects when it comes to witnesses, but it is important that the judgment is not who you are, but how good the ideas are that you contribute to a Select Committee inquiry.

Select Committees are very good at stepping outside conventional political debate, because there are subjects that party organisations, countrywide or in Parliament, find very inhibiting. A good current example is drugs policy; a Select Committee might well be able to make an extremely influential intervention, where politically there are lots of exposed nerve endings.

Select Committees are not particularly good at “what went wrong?” inquiries. I speak as the author of the report on the Westland affair about 30 years ago. We got that one right and it was a very successful inquiry, but perhaps I might say, with respect—which always implies that you are not going to say it with respect—that down the other end there is a bit too much ambulance chasing. I do not think that is particularly constructive. The disadvantage is that inquiries of that sort are incredibly resource hungry, because you are establishing facts in a forensic way and
there are real issues about fairness and human rights in properly constituted tribunals, and things of that sort.

**Lord Blunkett:** Lord Lisvane mentioned drugs policy. As a Minister, I made the terrible “error” in 2003 of taking seriously a report by a Select Committee on which a previous Prime Minister served, along with the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, on which a previous Prime Minister served, and reclassifying cannabis. Governments sometimes get their fingers burned by being open and honest to the genuine presentation of facts and reality. That was one of those times. I do not think it should stop us pressing very hard that government should learn from, participate in and welcome Select Committee reports, rather than seeing them as an interference, or even a threat. I do not regret taking that advice back in 2003; I just wish we had articulated it more effectively.

**The Chairman:** I remember that you and I talked about the Proceeds of Crime Act where we could have done more.

**Lord Low of Dalston:** We had evidence from the British Academy that identified six strong themes that might be the basis for a Select Committee structure: the economy; home affairs; health and welfare; foreign affairs, including Brexit and post-Brexit issues; defence and security; and, finally, the constitution and local government, including the nations, regions and cities of the United Kingdom. What do the two of you think of that as a suitable framework for a Select Committee structure?

**Lord Lisvane:** I read Alun Evans’s evidence. I would put it in a rather broader context. In a sense, it brings us immediately to the relationship between what the House of Commons is doing and what the House of Lords is doing and whether there are scrutiny gaps. Lord Blunkett used the word “complementarity”, as I think you did, too, Lord Chairman. It is vitally important to acknowledge that the two Houses should complement each other in their work and not compete. In that way, we use best the strengths of the parliamentary culture, which is profoundly different in each House.

**Lord Low of Dalston:** You talked about a vertical, as opposed to a horizontal, approach. Is it vertical for the House of Commons and horizontal for this House? Would you like to expand on that?

**Lord Lisvane:** It may be a bit fanciful, but I see the House of Commons Select Committee system as vertical, particularly as its lead element is the departmental Select Committee system. The committees look at the expenditure, administration and policy of individual government departments, and then drill down to related agencies, regulators and so on. In this House, there is a much more cross-cutting approach, which is ideally complementary. The danger would be to yield to the temptation to reflect or replicate the House of Commons system too exactly.

Some of your witnesses—for example, Sarah Wollaston in her excellent memorandum to you—said that, provided the contacts and understanding
were good, you could steer clear of problems, but as soon as you institutionalise areas of scrutiny you run the risk of the two Houses competing. The practical result is that it is very obvious to anybody in a policy area which are the hot topics, and those will be attractive for Select Committee work, so you are immediately vying for attention and the presence of Ministers and other key witnesses. The bottom line, and the really dangerous thing, is when a Lords committee and a Commons committee come to different conclusions. That is typically carte blanche for the Government of the day to ignore both.

**Lord Low of Dalston:** Do you think the British Academy framework caught your cross-cutting theme effectively?

**Lord Lisvane:** It did on constitutionality and, for example, on social care, which goes so much wider than health. I would be a bit worried about defence and security because there is potential overlap. I would add citizenship to that list, as I think has been suggested to you, because all the constitutional, educational, rule of law, immigration, demographical and social cohesion issues that would arise would be a really good example of a cross-cutting committee that would not tread on the toes of House of Commons committees, or vice versa.

**Lord Blunkett:** I can cut out a lot of my waffle by saying I agree entirely with all of that. You would expect me to agree on citizenship because it has been a theme of the whole of my political life. The cross-cutting proposals are absolutely essential not just to distinguish but properly to differentiate and give the opportunity to do things that House of Commons Select Committees do not do.

They also give us the opportunity to think more broadly. For instance, when we are dealing with security matters, cyber underpins all of that. Although committees dealing with defence and security touch on it, they do not get to grips with it in the way we could in looking to the future. The same is true of citizenship and identity.

**Lord Low of Dalston:** What do you think about industrial strategy? We have somebody coming later today to talk to us about his ideas for a committee to monitor the implementation of industrial strategy.

**Lord Lisvane:** I would be agnostic on that. I would say a word of warning that whatever structure one ends up with has to be flexible; otherwise, events will run ahead of it, and it will become less relevant as time moves on.

**The Chairman:** These are worthy proposals, but they have still to be worked on. You mentioned very pertinent issues. The idea was to provide a wider footprint for committees in the first instance, so that the House of Lords could undertake public policy inquiries, for which the experience and expertise here are ideal.

It would also provide flexibility. I have had a couple of meetings with Chairs along the Corridor. Frank Field said that in his inquiry into
pensions and Carillion he would welcome guesting from House of Lords Members for a short period of time on those issues, because this House is replete with people who have been on boards and have been Chairs of companies concerned with pension provision. It would help him.

The House of Lords could assist the House of Commons in live events. Complementarity is important, but such things are in an embryonic state at the moment. We have to change the structure in some way, but your points are very valid.

**Lord Lisvane:** It would certainly be mind-expanding to go down that road. If you do so, you will have to be careful about the clockwork. On what basis are people being involved? Are they full members? Are they co-opted? Are they advisers, witnesses or whatever? Once the terms of trade are clear, it could be very constructive.

**The Chairman:** The House of Commons has already come out with a report on guesting.

**Lord Lang of Monkton:** I want to ask specifically about ad hoc committees, but first may I follow up the extremely interesting and helpful comments that you made in your opening remarks and in answer to questions so far? I very much take on board Lord Lisvane's warning about this House not seeking to emulate the Commons on Select Committee work. For example, when the Public Administration Committee in the Commons added the word “Constitution” to its heading, it sent vibrations into this House. That is a thematic thing.

You seem to be talking more in themes than in specifics. Is it not more difficult when you have thematic Select Committee approaches to avoid overlap and possible contradiction between the Commons and the Lords? Are there any specific gaps you have not already mentioned that you think we should look at?

**Lord Blunkett:** You are entirely right. The more thematic you are, the more clearly you can identify how to avoid double-guessing and replicating. Themes change as society around us changes, so we have to be quick-footed. That is almost a paradox for the House of Lords. A few months ago, I said of an issue we were dealing with that, if you know the hare is going to be shot by somebody lying in the undergrowth, you might as well put your money on the tortoise. We operate like that.

If we are to address issues that are of the moment, but have long-term implications, which is what we have been talking about, it takes a bit of intellectual capacity to work out how to carry that forward. We can do it incrementally. We can deal with an issue that is immediately relevant, but we can place it in a long-term context and continue to develop work that allows us to monitor it.

Monitoring on its own is interesting. The Commons does that, or at least the departmental reflection of the Select Committees is supposed to do that, whereas, if we saw an issue as the first incremental step in something much more cross-cutting and long term, we would get the
best of both worlds. I have just served on the ad hoc Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, chaired ably by Robin Hodgson. Incidentally, we are seeing one of the Ministers following up that committee at 11.30, so I had better be brief.

We think we could carry that committee forward and return to it in due course. It might not be exactly the same membership. Even during the course of the committee, members on the government side were promoted to the Front Bench and, therefore, there was a change. It was a very able change. Margaret Eaton joined us, and that was fine. There will be change, but the idea, and the work that has already begun, could be built on.

Lord Lisvane: If I take it that the relationship between focused subjects and thematic coverage is at the heart of your question, the key thing is to keep the radar on and keep looking at it, and there I think informal contacts between committee staffs and exchanges of programmes of work, for example, can be of great practical utility.

If we are talking about scrutiny gaps, as I suppose to an extent we are, one of the things I have always been extremely sceptical about is a committee on legislative standards, which arose in the evidence you took from Lord Norton and Lord Cormack, but now my concern about the quality of primary and secondary legislation and the quality of scrutiny has brought me round to thinking that a legislative standards committee would be a good idea. It would probably have to absorb, or be based on, the Delegated Powers Committee, because the delegation of power is such a central issue in the quality of legislation, but both the DPRRC and the SLSC show how a gap in the Commons can be very effectively filled by the Lords.

There is one big scrutiny gap that I find very frustrating. In the *Shifting The Balance* process, one of the things I was very closely involved in was developing the core tasks for Select Committees, to give them a checklist of what they should be doing to cover the waterfront in the Commons method of operation. One of the things it was most difficult to get Select Committees to engage with was finance. That is frustrating because finance constitutionally falls primarily to the Commons; nevertheless, Parliament-wide, that is probably a scrutiny gap.

Lord Blunkett: It is important that Select Committee members, particularly on ad hoc committees with which I am more familiar, play a bigger part in determining the structure, the questions and the evidence to be sought than they appear to do at the moment.

Lord Lang of Monkton: Can I follow up on ad hoc committees? You raised this quite strongly in your evidence, Lord Blunkett. You talk about follow-up, but you do not suggest how it should be followed up. You touched on the fact that a Minister is replying to your report today, but is it your view that the ad hoc committee itself should remain in existence in order to carry out a follow-up, in which case does that not undermine the whole ad hoc committee principle? May I suggest that there are other
ways in which it should be done? For example, should this committee be able to lean on government and Ministers in a heavier way to get quick reactions and proper debate?

Lord Blunkett: That would probably be a more sure-footed way of doing it. As well as debate on the Floor of the House, which is taken as read but not always taken as seriously as it might be, I had it in mind that the committee, if the Chair was prepared to do so, could convene for perhaps two sessions a year later, take a look at what had happened and get the appropriate Ministers—five in the case of the cross-cutting committee I served on—to say whether they had decided to do anything, and, if they were honest about it and did not want to, to say they had no intention of doing anything, so that we did not waste our time.

Lord Lisvane: I absolutely endorse that. In my 40 or more years’ experience of Select Committees at both ends of the building, but certainly at the other end, one of the things I used to emphasise to Select Committee members and Chairs was the importance of follow-up. If you do not do that, you get to the end of an inquiry and policymakers and administrators heave a great sigh of relief, close the drawer of the filing cabinet and life moves on, but, if they know that you are going to go back to the inquiry in six or 12 months’ time, it is remarkably mind-concentrating.

In that context, I remember a lot of bleating—I am sorry to use an inappropriate word—from Select Committees that, oh dear, they did not get government replies in time. My technique was always to say to them, “Schedule a meeting with the Minister a week after the time limit for submitting the government reply. It works wonders”. That is well worth thinking about.

There is an important point about the structure of Lords committees. The evanescence of ad hoc committees is a problem. There is flexibility in appointing ad hoc committees, perhaps in completely new fields. I declare an interest because I made the proposal for a rural economy Select Committee, which I am delighted to say you and the House approved. That is very good, but the idea that it becomes functus officio after 12 months is a problem. To keep it in some sort of shadow existence may give procedural, structural and presentational problems, but if there were some way of institutionalising the follow-up it would be a great advantage.

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town: David, there is only one bit of your evidence that I disagree with. You say that you are going to “make no mention in relation to Brexit because the review will be inundated with thoughts on this matter”. In fact, we have heard almost nothing. Quite a few bits of evidence say that Brussels will still be there, or make some passing comment, but with one exception we have not had much serious thought about how we deal with Brexit. Could I ask both of you what your thoughts are about how the Select Committee structure might deal with things post exit next year?
Lord Blunkett: It would be a truly cross-cutting piece of work, but a way of defining it and refining it to manageable proportions would be to take a look at post-Brexit Britain in the round. We, the Government and the media are inevitably focused on the immediate issues coming before the two Houses and their implications, so there is very little debate about what Britain will look like in 10 years’ time and the steps where government could assist.

I am not a believer that all these things are down to government. We have issues to raise about the operation of our business community and civil society, and the reshaping of the regional and local government structure. Where would Britain be, and what would be our recommendations for putting an electric shock through the system? I am in favour of staying in, as you know, but, if we are to be out, we will have to do something dramatic. There will have to be a lightning bolt to the whole system in Britain if we are to survive in the new environment. The House of Lords could be much more radical in taking a look at that future than I ever envisaged when I entered it.

Lord Lisvane: I was giving evidence to the Commons Brexit Committee a few weeks ago. I likened it to a 14th-century religious poem with which I was certain Mr Rees-Mogg would be familiar.

Lord Blunkett: From the nursery.

Lord Lisvane: He said he did not know about it. It is called “The Cloud of Unknowing”, which really sums up where we are, because it is extremely difficult, with all the moving parts going on in Brexit and post Brexit, to see what we will end up with. One thing that is absolutely certain is that there will be a very lengthy legislative agenda. It will not stop with a period of transition or a period of implementation; I make a distinction between the characteristics of both of those things. It will not just be assimilation of 44 years of the acquis; it is about 60 years, because we gained the acquis when we joined on 1 January 1973.

The process of repatriation will be extremely complex and lengthy, and we must adapt our scrutiny processes to ensure that both Houses engage with it effectively. There will be sifting, whether by the European Scrutiny Committee in the Commons or the SLSC in the Lords, or however it works out, and there will be scrutiny, but that will be a continuing requirement. How one shadows the work of the joint EU-UK committee, for example, is another question.

Going back to “The Cloud of Unknowing”, it may be that after a period of time things settle down and we can go back to a departmental or thematic approach, but the turbulence means that it will be some time before we can confidently go down that road.

Lord Blunkett: I am very diffident about raising this. On the international front, the issue of Britain’s place in the world was first addressed in my time by Richard Crossman in the late 1960s, and nobody thanked him for it. Occasionally, we return to it, but the place of our
country in the world after Brexit will be like touching a hot stove. People will not want it to be thoroughly investigated, debated and presented, but I think the Lords might be able to do it.

**The Chairman:** “The Cloud of Unknowing” is not known just to you, Lord Lisvane; our clerk, Philippa, knows it very well too, so that is two of you.

**Lord Lisvane:** I am immensely reassured by that.

**Q96 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** I confess I know nothing of it, but I will chase it up.

We had some interesting contrasting evidence from Lords Boswell and Howell yesterday about post Brexit. They did not agree with each other, which was useful. Lord Lisvane is probably the best person to deal with this question. Would it help if Select Committees had more power to require witnesses to appear before them?

**Lord Lisvane:** Absolutely not. If I can direct your attention to a paper I wrote for the Commons Liaison Committee when I was Clerk of the House of Commons, it is a conundrum that has been lurking around all Select Committee work for years and years, and it comes to the surface when a Select Committee has a run-in with a particularly difficult witness. It rather ignores the fact that tens of thousands of witnesses readily appear before Select Committees, some quite reluctantly.

The big problem, related to the proposal to codify parliamentary privilege, which I hope has been shelved indefinitely, is that the moment you provide those powers, you have to provide for their exercise and for people not complying with the exercise. The only way you can do that is through the law and the courts. Even if you include safety devices, such as an Attorney-General’s fiat or something in between, you will not get away from the fact that in the end a court will ask, “Is it fair for this committee to ask this witness to attend?” Even further than that, a court might say, “How many dates did you give the witness? Did you give the witness the opportunity to be accompanied? Let’s have a look at your last evidence session. Were you badgering witnesses?” The court might want to see a video.

The moment you go down that road, anybody involved on this side of the road would think that sort of intrusion into parliamentary proceedings was retrograde in the extreme. Having talked to a number of very senior luminaries on the other side of the road, it is something the High Court and the Supreme Court would run a mile from.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** That is really helpful.

**Q97 Earl of Courtown:** We have already talked about the structure of committees and where we might be going. Lord Lisvane, you have talked about how important it is that we do not have competing and replicating committees in both Houses. Taking that into account, how can we develop the relationship between the committee structures in both Houses so that we make most use of the strength of Members of both
Houses? Sarah Wollaston said she would welcome input from this House, on a guest appearance basis. How do you think we can develop things so that the committee structures in both Houses gain from the membership of both Houses?

Lord Lisvane: There are a lot of ways to do it. Starting at staff level, although I have been out of this for four years, great effort was put into imparting and sharing best practice. What worked in an inquiry? What got you better evidence? What got you better outreach and engagement with an inquiry? I am sure it is still done. There is scope for the sharing of that experience between committee staffs in both Houses, and that is a positive development.

Given that the political cultures differ pretty profoundly in the two Houses, there is a limit to how far you can co-ordinate or share the scrutiny task. One thing that is helpful, but you need to exercise judgment in each case as to whether you deploy it, is the use of Joint Committees. Some of them, such as the Joint Committee on Human Rights, work extremely well. I am a great fan of draft Bills, and Joint Committees on draft Bills work very well. They ought to be attractive to the business managers because they avoid double-handling, and involve both Houses in consideration of a Bill, which should simplify subsequent proceedings, and would certainly improve their quality. It is not a panacea, but there is scope for using them a little more extensively.

Lord Blunkett: In my opening statement, I said that I am strongly in favour of developing what exists, carefully and where it is appropriate. In addition, it is possible to make more use of sharing evidence that has already been presented to a committee either in this House or in the Commons, so that people do not start from scratch. We tend to reinvent the wheel all the time. Government do it. They have no collective memory at all, which is quite worrying. We could have a collective memory by drawing on what has already been presented and using the expert adviser service. We could share that better as well, including analysing when it has worked well and when drawing on expert support and adviser work has been appropriate.

Lord Williams of Elvel: Can I ask a question about the composition of committees? Do you believe it is a strength or a weakness that they are Back-Bench committees?

Lord Lisvane: It is a great strength. If there are Front Benchers from one side, you need to have them from the other side, and the potential for confusion and confused motives is very strong. If you are seeking good Select Committees, which, without being anodyne—I emphasise that—can operate consensually and powerfully, the easiest base upon which to do that is purely Back Bench.

Lord Williams of Elvel: Would you say the same for this Committee—that it should be wholly Back Bench?
**Lord Lisvane:** I would not have the temerity to give an answer to that, only to observe that this Committee does a rather different job.

**Lord Blunkett:** As regards Whips on Select Committees, I am not even going to tread where angels fear.

**Baroness Garden of Frognal:** Lord Blunkett, in your comments at the beginning, and in your submission, you mentioned outreach and engagement as important for Lords committees. I am sure Lord Lisvane also has a view on that. How do you see it working? I am conscious that in our outreach through Peers in Schools we are very dependent on people from outside inviting us. How do you see committee outreach working?

**Lord Blunkett:** With the Chairman’s permission, I am about to sneak away and leave Lord Lisvane to pick up the pieces. One of the things I am still campaigning for is to get citizenship well taught in schools and colleges, and to get young people interested in what takes place here. We might think we are boring, but I do the outreach programme and I talked to two lots of children from schools yesterday. They love it when they come here.

The ability to teach citizenship and make it part of the process of understanding our constitution, Parliament and democracy, and for older students to be able to contribute something, is really important. We involved young people as part of the Select Committee hearings, but they turned up as representatives of formal groups, which rather undermined what we were trying to do.

With new technology, it will be possible to do things in 10 years’ time that we are just touching on at the moment. Technology would work rather than breaking down all the time. We will be able to do outreach to community groups and things of that sort. It will bring alive the purpose we seek to serve. The Commons obviously will need to be very much on the ball, because they are elected and accountable, but I would not hold my breath.

**Lord Lisvane:** Engaging with Select Committees is just one facet of improving the general engagement of Parliament, which is here to serve the people. Although many things can be done and so many exciting advances can be made, personal contact will still have a very powerful role to play. For about 30 years or more, I have given 70 or 80 talks a year to an extraordinary variety of audiences about how Parliament works and the worth of Parliament. If we all do that sort of thing—of course, all the people in this Room do—it is a very valuable component.

We need to take into account that for a lot of people engagement with a Select Committee can be extremely daunting, which is an easy thing to forget from within this institution. People become a bit trepidant about engaging with a place that looks like a cathedral from outer space. Will they do it right or will they do it wrong? There is a lot of room not only for knowledge building but for confidence building.
I have a word of warning. When you build up the value of engagement, you have to deliver. If you invite people to become involved and put in their views, which you should be doing, you need a credible and convincing way of taking those into account and showing people that for Parliament’s part it has engaged with them just as they have engaged with Parliament.

**Lord Blunkett:** That is a superb conclusion, if you will let me go. It involves resource, but when people provide evidence, if we do not feed back to them what we have done, what the conclusion is and that we are trying to follow it up, they will become even more disillusioned.

**Q99 The Chairman:** Lord Blunkett, we are grateful for your presence this morning. Integral to this review is increasing the reputation of the House over time. That is very important. Do you have a last word on that?

**Lord Blunkett:** We are moving slowly to greater reform. I know that not everyone agrees, but the survival of the House of Lords in a way that does not simply end up with an elected Second Chamber that mirrors the elected Chamber and leads to gridlock means that the way people see this House and value it will really matter. We cannot bury our heads in the sand because the world will overwhelm us. We have to stand up and be counted on occasion, as many people are doing at the moment. If we ignore public opinion, we do so at our peril. We owe it to the people who will come after us to try to make sure we get this right.

**The Chairman:** Lord Blunkett, we give you our thanks. Best wishes to your committee.

**Lord Blunkett:** I am already late for the meeting, but, as it was relevant to what we are discussing, thank you for letting me speak.

**The Chairman:** Lord Lisvane, what do we keep in mind as we move forward?

**Lord Lisvane:** I would endorse the criteria for success Lord Norton gave you in evidence. Lords committees, and the House of Lords more generally, should be making a difference to the content and quality of legislation; they should be informing and shaping debate; and they should be valued in the world outside for doing those things. Those are not things that should be done in 10 or 20 years; they should be done now, but we can build on that approach. The more the House of Lords and, come to that, the House of Commons do that, the better. I have always had a mantra about the relationship between Parliament and the people. If you understand something, you start to value it, and, if you value it, you start to own it. Ownership on the part of the people Parliament is here to serve is an immensely important factor.

**The Chairman:** That is a superb peroration.

**Lord Low of Dalston:** From what you have just been saying and from Lord Norton’s evidence, there is a distinction between process and substantive committees that it is important for us to latch on to in our
work. The legislative standards committee, and I suppose the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, are a bit of both; they are both substantive and process, but it is important to get hold of that distinction.

**Lord Lisvane:** It is very important. It may be said that those committees need to engage rather less, because they are dealing with technical issues and advising the House in a very direct and mechanical way, although “mechanical” is the wrong word. They are producing a product for the immediate use of the House. For the Constitution Committee, there is a broader issue. Nevertheless, for the SLSC and the Delegated Powers Committee, the distinction you make is a valid one.

**Lord Low of Dalston:** I am sorry to ruin your peroration.

**The Chairman:** Thank you very much, Lord Lisvane.