Introduction

1. This note concerns the structure of the Select Committees of the House of Lords and makes proposals for a more streamlined system. It recommends a strategic and thematic framework of six committees covering the main functions of government and today’s, and likely future, challenges. It would provide a much clearer focus and rationale than at present.

Background

2. Whereas the Select Committee system in the House of Commons has been developed to provide committees to shadow each department of state, the nature and structure of the Select Committees of the House of Lords have evolved over time in a more haphazard way, with a much less clear logic for the current Lords structure.

3. There are now several major Committees that run inquiries, together with some other more thematic or subject specific ad-hoc committees. There does not appear however to be a strong rationale for the current shape and structure of the committees. That said, many of them are well respected and have exceptionally strong memberships. Some of the inquiries that have been carried out have led to significant reports and strong recommendations. Any revised system must seek to build on that record of success.

Rationale

4. The rationale for the House of Lords Select Committees should reflect the rationale for, and the role of, the House of Lords itself. That is essentially twofold - scrutiny and strategy:

- To provide a scrutiny and challenge function to the House of Commons and proposals coming from that House including its committees; and
To provide an overview and strategic sense of direction on some of the key political challenges of our day. It is this latter function that might best shape the Select Committee structure for the House of Lords, but it should not be difficult to keep that consistent with the former.

**Proposal**

5. We propose that the structure of the major House of Lords Select Committees should both reflect the main strategic and thematic challenges facing the nation today and the functions of government. We have identified six strong themes:

- The economy
- Home affairs
- Health and welfare
- Foreign affairs, including Brexit and post Brexit issues
- Defence and security
- The constitution and local government (including the nations, regions and cities of the United Kingdom)

6. Such a framework of committees would provide the opportunity for the House of Lords to cover all the major cross departmental challenges and look at them in a more joined up way than at present. Membership of the committees could be chosen to ensure as wide a spread of expertise as possible. The above six committees would drive the overall strategy of the House as well as the major areas for inquiry. None of the above would prevent the creation of additional task related and time related inquiries. However, they should be able to report up to one or more of the strategic committees. The committees may wish to create sub-committees. It is worth noting that other policy areas for inquiry would be capable of being analysed by this framework of thematic committees that we propose. For example, housing issues would fall to the economy committee; the issue of local government social care would fall to the health and welfare committee; environment issues would come under the economy as would farming, but both might have additional scrutiny by the committee examining post Brexit issues – and so on.

7. It would be important for the committees to have a free rein over which issues ot consider. For example, it would be important that they were not prevented from investigating a particular area if there
was other work ongoing or if other bodies (departments, all party groups or think-tanks etc) were already looking into the area. The House of Lords committees should be the bodies that can be seen as providing the most independent, joined up and strategic advice.

8. House of Lords Select Committees should look to build the best sources of evidence and analysis to inform their policy making. This would include universities, national academies and international sources of best practice.

9. These proposals should be keep under regular review. Committees should be time limited (perhaps three years) and their membership and terms of reference might be revised as necessary in the light of events and of major shifts in world or national politics.

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