Firstly on the **overall structure of select committees** in the Lords I argued strongly for a fresh approach given that the current committee structure has clearly grown up in a piecemeal way over the years with the result that its rationale is quite hard to discern. I also felt that with so many committees currently devoted to scrutiny of EU legislation, this in itself provides an opportunity to completely re-draw the committee structure.

As you know I am a strong supporter of the current ad hoc select committees, having served now on four including chairing the recent Financial Exclusion Select Committee. They provide a very helpful means of addressing topical issues and allow members to contribute their wide ranging expertise to a raft of important policy areas. That said, the downside is that it leads to a rather fragmented committee structure with little overall coherence in the range of subjects selected and crucially a real loss of corporate knowledge as ad hoc committees are currently simply disbanded with no follow-up resource allocated (see below).

My solution to this would be to establish around six broad, thematic standing committees which would each conduct a series of inquiries but crucially build up and make best use of the body of knowledge that they have acquired through those inquiries rather than starting from scratch each time. Whilst there are clearly a number of ways of cutting the cake my suggestion was something along the lines of broad based, cross cutting standing committees in the following areas:

- economic affairs
- domestic affairs
- social policy
- environmental affairs
- science and technology
• international affairs.

As you suggested we might also want to retain a constitution committee.

I explained that my rationale for separating out domestic affairs from social policy is that the weight of domestic issues around home affairs, immigration, policing, justice, civil liberties, equalities, culture, media etc is such that a separate social policy committee clustered around health, education, welfare, social care, poverty and disadvantage would ensure that these crucial matters received sufficient coverage and in a more joined up manner. Indeed I would suggest that all four of the ad hoc select committees I have sat on, (ageing population, affordable childcare, social mobility and financial exclusion) would have benefitted from being discrete inquiries sitting within a broader social policy thematic committee which built upon a wider corpus of policy and research knowledge rather than approaching each new inquiry as from a blank piece of paper.

Such a social policy based committee could develop a deep understanding of demographic trends, changing social attitudes and undertake horizon scanning to identify new social issues thereby ensuring that it was ahead of the curve on key social issues which are of direct relevance to people’s everyday lives. I would suggest that the new ad hoc select committee on Inter-Generational Fairness (which I proposed and am delighted has been selected) would very much fit into this category. I feel that this approach would allow the House of Lords to reach out to people in the country and appear less remote.

I fully recognise the need for House of Lords select committees not to duplicate the business of Commons select committees but feel that around half a dozen broad based, cross cutting committees of the type I have suggested above would allow the House of Lords to

1 The Chairman
do what it does best ie look at cross-cutting issues which range across a number of Government Departments and take a longer term, strategic perspective – often a 10 to 15 year perspective.

I also feel that a committee structure of this nature would help to maximise engagement with stakeholders outside of Parliament and raise the profile of House of Lords committee work more generally. It should be possible to do considerably more outreach work – particularly where committees go out on visits around the country and talk face to face to people most directly affected by the subject matter. This can often elicit extremely important first hand evidence of a very different type to that normally provided in a set piece committee evidence sessions with expert witnesses coming in to give both oral and written evidence. It should also be possible to engage with people via social media and other interactive channels more attractive to young people as part of a wider national conversation.

Thirdly I would welcome an opportunity for backbenchers to have a greater say on how topics are chosen for current ad hoc committees if they should continue in this form, or indeed for specific inquiries undertaken by the type of broad thematic committees that I am proposing. I feel that backbenchers should have a greater opportunity to contribute to the process of shortlisting and deciding on final topics. I’m also a strong supporter of a Backbench Business Committee as a means of providing more opportunities for backbenchers to help shape the non-governmental business of the Lords rather than it all being left to the “usual channels”.

Fourthly I would be in favour of a greater degree of internal democracy in how chairs and indeed members of ad hoc committees are chosen. I would support the election of Committee Chairs as takes place in the House of Commons. This would give Chairs greater legitimacy and clout, and help ensure that they had strong cross-party support. Members putting themselves forward to serve as Committee Chairs would have an opportunity to set out
their credentials for being an effective chair as well as explaining how they would go about the process of chairing a select committee so as to ensure maximum effectiveness.

Finally, as we have discussed before, it is essential that appropriate resource is devoted to the follow-up of select committee reports to ensure that their recommendations have maximum leverage on government policy making. One of the major weaknesses of the current ad hoc select committees is that they disband immediately after the report is produced and the committee secretariat immediately takes on new work and is unable to provide any follow-up support to Chairs. In my view this significantly diminishes the likelihood of the recommendations being taken seriously by Government as a period of further advocacy and discussions with Ministers is generally required after the report is published for it to gain any real traction. At the moment Government responses to select committee reports are often very inadequate, quite often simply rehearsing what the Government is already doing in a certain area and sometimes completely failing to address important recommendations.

Under the current regime it comes down to whether the Chair is prepared to put in considerable personal time and effort for follow up work and do so without any secretariat support. For example as Chair of the former Financial Exclusion committee I have undertaken follow-up work in terms of speaking at external events, requesting meetings with Ministers and other key stakeholders to push forward the report’s recommendations, responding to correspondence including from members of the public, doing both proactive and reactive press work as it arises and trying to maintain a national conversation around financial exclusion to build on the momentum that the select committee report generated. I have also provided update notes to former members of the select committee so they are aware of the activities I have undertaken and have opportunities to contribute if they so wish. Doing all of this without any support is
far harder than if there were even a small degree of secretarial support to assist with these tasks and keeping up-to-date in the policy area.

I hope this is helpful.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield

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