

HOUSE OF LORDS
MINUTES OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN BEFORE
THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION

CABINET OFFICE INQUIRY

WEDNESDAY 14 OCTOBER 2009

RT HON TESSA JOWELL MP

Evidence heard in Public

Questions 258 - 291

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WEDNESDAY 14 OCTOBER 2009

Present

Goodlad, L (Chairman)
Lyell of Markyate, L
Morris of Aberavon, L
Norton of Louth, L
Pannick, L
Peston, L
Rodgers of Quarry Bank, L
Rowlands, L
Shaw of Northstead, L
Wallace of Tankerness, L
Woolf, L

Witness: **Rt Hon Tessa Jowell**, a Member of the House of Commons, Minister for the Cabinet Office, the Olympics, London and Paymaster General, examined.

Q258 Chairman: Minister, good morning, and a very warm welcome on behalf of the Committee; thank you very much indeed for being with us. We are being televised so before inviting you, if you would like, to make a brief opening statement can I ask you to formally identify yourself for the record?

Tessa Jowell: My Lord Chairman, thank you very much indeed. I am Tessa Jowell, I am the Minister for the Cabinet Office, the Paymaster General and Minister for the Olympics.

Q259 Chairman: Do you want to say a few words?

Tessa Jowell: If I may perhaps, in response to your very kind invitation, just set the scene. The first point I wanted to make, having read a lot of the evidence of the sessions that you have already had, is how valuable an inquiry I see this as being and I look forward to your report and looking at the recommendations that you make, and I would also like to commend the constructiveness of your approach. I would like to just frame the following points that perhaps we could explore further. The first, the “centre” as we describe the collective

functions of the Cabinet Office, Number 10 and the Treasury, is and must be flexible and responsive to the demands of the day. We will no doubt explore this more fully but this has always been a changing relationship and I am quite sure will continue to be so. The second point is that there is no single template or blueprint for the way in which government should be run and again, perhaps, this is something that we can explore further, but it is the heady mix of manifesto commitment, constitutional responsibility and clear departmental brief driven by a professional and impartial civil service, but it will always be coloured by the personalities of the day. That is why any single prescription is never likely to sustain much scrutiny or survive outside the laboratory of this kind of inquiry. I would point to ways in which the Cabinet Office and the Centre have adapted to some of the more contemporary changes. For instance, in the downturn, co-ordinating the work of the G20, establishing the National Economic Council, but there are also other examples – the establishment of e-government, better regulation, the contest strategy which then obviously went out to the Home Office, initiatives which were incubated, if you like, in the Cabinet Office and then mainstreamed within the relevant department of government. Bringing together, as we do, the policy co-ordination function and the civil service HR function we are, I hope, doing everything we can to ensure that the bedrock of delivery – propriety and transparency right across government – the professional modern civil service, has the skills and flexibilities to deliver high quality policy in what is a very rapidly changing world.

Q260 Chairman: Thank you very much indeed, Minister. Can I begin by asking you if there are any major constitutional issues relating to the Cabinet Office and the centre of government which you think it would be helpful for the Committee to focus on in our report to the House?

Tessa Jowell: I thought about this quite a bit when preparing for this session and actually the best way to define the constitutional basis is in the context of the obligation of impartiality, professionalism and the other values of the civil service, enshrined in the Civil Service Code,

that will shortly be put on a statutory footing. That is a very important thing. Maintaining impartiality and professionalism perhaps represents the constitutional bedrock together with, obviously, overseeing the propriety in the discharge of government functions, the conduct of ministers and so forth. That would be my short answer to your question.

Chairman: Thank you very much. Lord Shaw.

Q261 Lord Shaw of Northstead: Minister, in your submission you state that the three core functions of the Cabinet Office are: Supporting the Prime Minister; Supporting the Cabinet; and Strengthening the Civil Service. Can the proper balance of support for each of these be achieved if they remain under one roof?

Tessa Jowell: The answer is yes, and I say yes because the Cabinet Office obviously has a very close working relationship with Number 10 and I have been interested to read the arguments that have developed in the Committee about the competing arguments in support of a Prime Minister's department as opposed to a Cabinet Office. In the real world of policy administration there is a very clear distinction – sometimes creating tension – between the role of Number 10 which provides the most immediate support to the Prime Minister and then the broader support function that the Cabinet Office provides. It is also important to stress the support that the Cabinet Office provides in servicing the range of 46 Cabinet Committees, which are very much the engine of so much government policy development and policy recommendation, which is then taken to Cabinet.

Q262 Lord Morris of Aberavon: Minister, forgive me, there have been periods in my life when there has been no minister in the Cabinet Office. I do not know how many ministers you have but could you persuade me that any role that you perform could not be performed by the Cabinet Secretary? Does not your very existence diminish that role?

Tessa Jowell: Not in any sense at all and my role as Minister for the Cabinet Office is unusual in that I also have a number of other functions, perhaps most notably as Paymaster General but also as Minister for the Olympics, a major national project which relies entirely on close co-operation, working relationships and delivery across a range of other departments. In relation specifically to the Cabinet Office I have at the moment a team comprising one other minister, which may be increased shortly to two junior ministers, and if you looked at our specific ministerial responsibilities – today I am publishing a Parliamentary answer setting out ministerial responsibility – you would see that the areas of responsibility I carry and my junior ministers carry are quite distinct from the overall co-ordination function, development of the civil service in an organisational way, that the Cabinet Secretary himself is responsible for.

Q263 Lord Rowlands: I would like to clarify the role of the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Office in one respect. Reading your submission, heavy on capability and reviews, the role it plays to bring efficiency to departments et cetera et cetera, and yet now we have also got the separate Prime Minister's Delivery Unit. Why do you have a delivery unit in the Prime Minister's Office when it seems that the burden of your submission is that the Cabinet Office is driving this efficiency, driving a better delivery programme et cetera? Why do you need a separate unit for the Prime Minister's Office?

Tessa Jowell: The delivery unit is now actually in the Treasury because its focus is very specifically on measuring the impact of public service reform. Public service reform at the last reshuffle was aligned with public expenditure.

Q264 Lord Rowlands: It is no longer the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit.

Tessa Jowell: It is still called the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit but it is physically located in the Treasury.

Q265 Lord Rowlands: But who does it answer to, the Chancellor or the Prime Minister?

Tessa Jowell: Ultimately we all answer to the Prime Minister, but to the Chief Secretary and then to the Chancellor.

Q266 Lord Pannick: My question is whether the Cabinet Office has too much on its plate, whether you can at one and the same time meet the desire of the Prime Minister for a stronger centre and yet also be the department that is responsible for the whole of the civil service.

Tessa Jowell: You can take a snapshot of the responsibilities that the Cabinet Office carries as of now, but they would not necessarily be the same responsibilities in six months' time or a year's time because, as I set out briefly in my opening statement, there are areas where the Cabinet Office will intervene and incubate and then the specific policies and the units to support their development and delivery will be repatriated to the relevant department. I think that is a very good and creative role, and certainly if you had stasis at the centre where the Cabinet Office was constantly initiating new areas of policy and responsibility you would have confusion with departments, you would have tension with departments and you would have, as you suggest, overload. There is a pretty high level of vigilance about the Cabinet Office workload and the relevance of functions at any time being held at the centre rather than being sent out to departments.

Q267 Lord Pannick: Do ministers resent the supervision that you exercise?

Tessa Jowell: I do not think that my role is a supervisory one. I certainly have to some degree a co-ordination role, ensuring that where you have policies that rely on multilateral relationships between departments for their delivery, that those policies are given the necessary support and brokerage where necessary in order that they be delivered. I have been a minister for 12½ years and if one looks back what is interesting is the way in which the role of the centre has adapted and changed. It has had different personalities organisationally at

different times and that is a matter of fact, it will change, it is never static. It is shaped by this constant interaction of the constitutional basis which I have outlined, the functional responsibilities of keeping the whole show on the road, the personalities at any time and the precedence of particularly policies. To some extent it holds a mirror to the priorities of government at any time.

Q268 Lord Rodgers of Quarry Bank: If I may pursue that matter, it has been described that there is a “dustbin” function within the Cabinet Office, at another time as a “ragbag” and at another as a “bran tub”. If indeed you have seven permanent secretaries, where are they and how do you fit them in? I would like to know just as a factual point, if I may ask you, how many civil servants there are within the Cabinet Office and where is it? Is it now distributed around Whitehall or where is it – that is a factual question which I do not ask you to answer immediately. I see that in the foreword to the annual report of the Cabinet Office you refer amongst others things to the role of the Cabinet Office in dealing with “families hit hardest”. Is this not a good example of being involved in important detail when it should be dealing with the big strategic issues and does it not diminish the role of departments when these questions of detail are somewhere around Downing Street? Is everything now pushing away from departments to the Cabinet Office to deal with detailed matters as you say in your foreword to this report?

Tessa Jowell: Thank you; let me answer your various questions. The first is on numbers: there are about 1400 civil servants employed both in Number 10 and the Cabinet Office, a little under 200 in Number 10 and about 1200 in the Cabinet Office.

Q269 Lord Rodgers of Quarry Bank: Are they officials working for the Cabinet Office and out of the Cabinet Office or are they present at the usual place, the numbers you have given? Are they in outposts of one kind or another?

Tessa Jowell: Some will be working in locations outside, at either 22 or 79 Whitehall, but that remains the centre of the Cabinet Office with the link door to Number 10. There are six senior officials of permanent secretary rank within the Cabinet Office and, taking the point which I know was made in evidence about the Cabinet Office doing too much – the dustbin function or the bran tub analogy – I simply do not recognise that and given that, from memory, these were observations by highly respected commentators I would just say that the role of the centre, the dynamic of the relationship between the centre of government and other departments and Number 10 versus Number 11, this is the stuff of endless and engaging commentary but it does not always bear a direct relationship. This kind of laboratory view of government does not actually properly reflect the day-to-day work. My answer to the bran tub or the dustbin would be the point that I hope I made earlier, that this is dynamic, and it is certainly the case that sometimes functions which do not have a logical home elsewhere may reside for a period of time in the Cabinet Office. Where there is a particular urgency in getting a policy going, like the Contest strategy, which involved very high-level negotiation and co-ordination across key departments – the intelligence services and so forth – it started in the Cabinet Office and then it was moved out to the Home Office. Your very particular reference to hard-hit families is part of the co-ordination and delivery function across government that the Cabinet Office has for the Building Britain's Future programme which includes the very large number of very specific sources of advice and help to families up and down the country. The Cabinet Office is not usurping the delivery function of Work and Pensions, the Department of Health, the Department for Children, Schools and Families, it is co-ordinating the communication because with these new programmes public take-up relies very heavily on public understanding of their purpose. The function to which you refer is one specifically of communication and co-ordination.

Q270 Lord Rowlands: I was very struck in paragraph 5 of your submission where you drew to our attention that there are 1500 fewer employees in the Cabinet Office than there were in 1997. Where have they gone, or has the Prime Minister's department grown as a counter to it or what? What has happened?

Tessa Jowell: I can certainly supply the Committee with the figures for the whole Prime Minister's department going back to 1997. The most recent figures indicate a reduction, but remember that there has been a major efficiency programme that has been operating across government, across all departments, since the last Comprehensive Spending Review, so the loss of civil servants will be accounted for in part by that, in part by relocation of functions. I am very happy to supply some further information on that.

Q271 Lord Rowlands: You make the point in your submission as you have made today about the dynamic nature of it, that some have moved out, some have been made independent and some have been wound up. I wonder if you could provide us with a list of those who have gone out of the Cabinet Office, moved on or what has happened.

Tessa Jowell: Yes, we can certainly do that.

Q272 Lord Wallace of Tankerness: In contrast to Lord Rodgers' reference to a dustbin you have described the Cabinet Office as an incubator. I just wondered, is that something you have seen as an historic function of the Cabinet Office, what examples can you give of what has been incubated and mainstreamed and what are you incubating at the moment?

Tessa Jowell: A good example of the Cabinet Office as an incubator is the work that has been done on social exclusion, which you will understand was a very high priority for the Government when we were elected in 1997. The then Prime Minister established, under his direct control, the Social Exclusion Unit, and what has happened over the last 12 years is that initially the Social Exclusion Unit produced reports on the particularly intractable aspects of

social policy and then the relevant departments were charged with implementing the recommendations. A lot of that work has been mainstreamed in departments and a lot of it has developed a further identity – if one takes the preoccupation with antisocial behaviour, the establishment of the Respect Taskforce – and so that is an example of a major area of government policy which has been, in very particular respects, very successful and which has seen a dynamic move from Number 10, with very intense levels of prime ministerial involvement, very clear mandates for departments to achieve change. Now the Social Exclusion Taskforce which is in the Cabinet Office has identified three specific groups of people who represent numerically about 55,000: young people leaving care, people with learning disability seeking employment and people with long term mental health difficulties. These are people whose problems in living normal life can be enormous and so the focus has moved from street homelessness, teenage pregnancy, the geographic distribution of worklessness to this very sharp focus. That is an example of this dynamic process that I was trying to set out for you earlier.

Q273 Lord Wallace of Tankerness: That is very helpful. Let me just clarify my own mind: when the Social Exclusion Unit was established under the personal guidance and direction of the Prime Minister was it located in Number 10 or was it under the aegis of the Cabinet Office?

Tessa Jowell: I am doing this from memory but I think it was physically located in the Cabinet Office. The important thing was that it enjoyed very strong patronage from the Prime Minister. The other examples of units which have started in the Cabinet Office and moved out would be, as I have mentioned, the delivery unit now in the Treasury – and perhaps it is now called the delivery unit rather than the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit – the Better Regulation Unit which is now in BIS and the Office of the e-envoy and e-commerce.

Q274 Lord Woolf: Not surprisingly you have identified your views about the strength of the Cabinet Office. With your experience of its workings are there aspects which you regard as weaknesses which need to be addressed?

Tessa Jowell: I would define it as a fact of life rather than a weakness. If you have responsibility for co-ordination, for brokering on occasion agreements between departments through the Cabinet Committee structure or outside that, then if you bring no money but you bring the authority of the Cabinet Office, a successful result relies on the power of persuasion, the support of the Prime Minister, and so it is an informal rather than a formal relationship. That is a fact of life in any negotiation in government. I also think that one of the changes that has been achieved over the last 12 years is much more inter-departmental working, so whereas back in 1997 essentially the way in which thematic policy was implemented was driven on the initiative of Number 10 or the Cabinet Office, departments now are much more used to working bilaterally in order to achieve policy objectives.

Q275 Lord Woolf: One of the areas which could possibly be said to be a weakness and has been identified in the evidence which you will have read and observed, is that the Cabinet Office has sometimes allowed new policies and initiatives to be announced without any recognition of the implications of those initiatives and the difficulty of implementing them. I have got in mind in particular here the constitutional changes that have been announced in a rather half-baked way.

Tessa Jowell: The particular issue to which you refer was one where the policy was right and the outcome was right but everybody recognises that there were some mistakes made in the process of implementation. You are going to have to rely on diaries over the next ten or fifteen years to understand fully how the situation arose, but if I understand you, Lord Woolf, a policy which altered the role of the Lord Chancellor and disaggregated the three functions was one which reflected the need for change. Any error was in implementation.

Q276 Lord Woolf: What I was interested in is whether it is one of the tasks of the Cabinet Office to see that a change of that nature is not implemented or set out without the problems being identified?

Tessa Jowell: I do not think that that is the responsibility of the Cabinet Office.

Q277 Lord Woolf: Whose responsibility is it then?

Tessa Jowell: I was not party to those discussions but that would have been discussed at a Cabinet Committee, in bilateral discussion with the Prime Minister, but this is where the Cabinet Committee structure is so important. Yes, you are right that the Cabinet Office services the Cabinet Committee but the decision that you have used as an illustration of your point was a highly political decision, taken for very good constitutional reasons. One has to have realistic expectations of what the Cabinet Office can achieve by way of a timely intervention to prevent mistakes happening. It certainly does happen and the occasions where it works successfully are largely undocumented because the problem was averted. There was a problem in relation to this but it was a problem that was recovered, and the policy that we now have or the effect of the policy is undoubtedly the right one.

Q278 Lord Lyell of Markyate: Coming, Minister, if we may, to the interaction of key players in the centre – and you made the point about the importance of being flexible and responsive, and the word joined-up comes to mind – yesterday Sir Ian Johnston reported on the Damian Green affair. Did you have any part in this? How could it happen that the Cabinet Office did not warn that that whole area of immigration had been removed from the criminal law as far as matters of leaks and that sort of thing were concerned? How could it happen that no warning was given to the Home Secretary or indeed that the Home Secretary, who must also be in the centre, did not realise that it was utterly inappropriate for the anti-terrorist police to go in and start making arrests and raids on Parliament?

Tessa Jowell: I was not Cabinet Office Minister at the time but I know that there was no ministerial involvement in the decisions taken to take action in anticipation of a potential breach of the Official Secrets Act. I really have nothing to add to the report that has been published but it will be very important that lessons are learnt from that. You will know very well about the importance of ministers being kept out of decisions where any subsequent charge of political bias or political interference could have a material bearing on any subsequent inquiry. I was not in the Cabinet Office at the time, I have obviously been briefed on what happened at the time, I know that my predecessor Liam Byrne, now Chief Secretary, was not involved and I do know that the decision was taken because of what was considered to be a breach of the Official Secrets Act.

Q279 Lord Lyell of Markyate: This is what I am trying to pursue; how can the Cabinet Office legal advisers, who are usually of very high quality, not have been consulted and not have warned that since 1989 when Douglas Hurd changed the law this had not been an area for the criminal law at all? Why on earth was that not brought to the attention of the Home Office, though one wonders why they did not know themselves? Is this not precisely a Cabinet Office co-ordinating function as it used to be?

Tessa Jowell: I do not know whether 20 years ago the Cabinet Office would have responded differently but what is quite clear from my understanding of the Cabinet Office's response is that they took precautionary action. The fact that the leaks did not in fact represent a risk to national security is a judgment that was made on the basis of the inquiry and with the benefit of hindsight.

Q280 Lord Lyell of Markyate: It was not a judgment on the basis of the inquiry, it had been removed from the criminal law altogether, it did not matter what the facts were.

Tessa Jowell: Again, My Lord Chairman, I am very happy to provide further information on the basis on which the Cabinet Office legal advisers considered advice at the time. It may be necessary for that to be provided in confidence but I am certainly very happy to ensure that you get further information.

Q281 Lord Peston: I am still a bit lost about the role of the Cabinet Office although you are doing the best you can to tell us what you do. Lord Lyell's example is a good example; everybody knows somehow that the anti-terrorist legislation is being misused; there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that it is being called in when it does not apply. In a sense everybody knows about it but no one seems to have responsibility for dealing with the misuse. I do not see how you as Minister, plus your department, can do your job unless you yourselves know what is going on and it is not at all clear how you get to know what is going on as it were.

Tessa Jowell: Addressing the misapplication of legislation is a responsibility for Parliament but in turn for the department that has responsibility. If we go back to your central question, what is the relationship between the functions of the centre and departmental responsibility, then the functions of the centre are clear, as I have tried to set out: the constitutional function, the responsibility for the civil service and the responsibility for the good conduct of government. There are then other very specific areas of responsibility that are held at the centre. My ministerial team and I between us share responsibility for the third sector, for supporting the Prime Minister in the development of the national security report, the school of government, civil contingency and a range of other functions that you will see published today. In addition to that, as Minister for the Cabinet Office, I am also responsible for the Olympics, for London and for humanitarian assistance. All of those are functions which are properly located in the Cabinet Office, perhaps with the exception of Minister for London, but certainly as Minister for the Olympics, Minister for Humanitarian Assistance and Paymaster

General. These are all ministerial functions which require a very high level of bilateral or multilateral co-ordination from the centre.

Q282 Lord Peston: I understand that; what I cannot understand is the mechanism. Let us leave the Olympics on one side, I can see that as a very straightforward job that you have got which you do very well.

Tessa Jowell: Very straightforward!

Q283 Lord Peston: What I cannot see is do you sit down every week and go through every department? You used the word “supportive” and that word appears all the time. Do you say, “Home Office: what are we doing this week that supports the Home Office in what they are doing? Treasury: the economy is in a mess, what are we doing?” For department after department do you act supportively to find out where you can support them, or do you wait for them to come to you – and the last thing they are going to do is come to you as far as I can see – and say what can you do to help?

Tessa Jowell: This is the role of both the Cabinet Committee discussion and the Cabinet itself. No, I certainly do not review the top line issues for every department every week. I am a senior member of the Cabinet and I know what is going on as a member of the Cabinet. The Prime Minister might ask me to work with X, Y or Z department on a particular issue but we have a mature departmental structure and I think that is important, that secretaries of state are responsible for their departments, that permanent secretaries as accounting officers are responsible for their departments. What the smooth conduct of government does not want is something which is another layer of audit and could be seen as meddling. The alternative view of that, I well understand, could be well it might improve foresight. The volume of effort that would go into such scrutiny would not be repaid by identifying problems early and where that degree of anticipation is developed more is actually in Number 10. Remember

also that the Prime Minister has regular stocktakes with the secretaries of state, which are intended to monitor the implementation of policy and anticipate problems which are looming.

Q284 Lord Morris of Aberavon: Minister, in reply to Lord Lyell's question you very politely reminded us that you were not a minister in the Cabinet Office at that stage. Knowing the facts as they are now, would you have acted differently?

Tessa Jowell: Of course with the benefit of hindsight mistakes are identified, you think had we known then what we know now we would no doubt have reached a different decision, but with great respect it does not get you very far. The absolute obligation, whether as a minister or a permanent secretary, is to take decisions carefully on the basis of the best available information and in a context that reflects the broad values and priorities of the government. It is incumbent on every minister to pursue their responsibilities in that way, not driven by media headlines or other distractions, but on the basis of an understanding of the issue itself. It would be very hard for anyone to put their hand on their heart and look back over the last 12 years and say "Were there things that I could have done better? Were there things that the government could have done better?" It would be sheer arrogance to say that there are none.

Chairman: Minister, you have duties in the other place at 12.00 I know, but we have just got time for a question from Lord Rowlands and then finally Lord Norton.

Q285 Lord Rowlands: Minister, you said you have read quite a lot of the evidence we have received and you will know that we have been looking to find out how much 1997 and what has happened since 1997 has changed the role of the Cabinet Office and changed the role of the Prime Minister's department. How would you characterise the changes that have occurred since 1997? How much of a watershed is it in terms of the development of the centre of government and how does the centre of the two Prime Ministers since 1997 compare with that which went before?

Tessa Jowell: You have highlighted one of the very important variables that makes a laboratory construction of the centre of government very hard to do because the character of the centre is very heavily defined by the phase of the electoral cycle, so the role of the centre in 1997 was much more vigorously interventionist. You had a government of ministers who were in government for the first time, you had departments that were faced with radically new policy priorities and you had a government that was in a hurry to achieve results. Now the government is much more mature, you have much more self-confident departments and self-confident ministers – that is a good thing. The role of the centre changes in response to that and it also changes in relation to the national climate. Obviously I have referred to Building Britain’s Future and the role of the Cabinet Office in that; the centre for the last year to 18 months has been heavily engaged in the impact of the economic downturn and the global financial crisis - the Treasury, Number 10 and also the Cabinet Office. You could almost write a ten-year story or narrative or account of the development of the role of the centre and the role of the Cabinet Office – the Cabinet Office in relation to Number 10, the Cabinet Office in relation to the business of Cabinet Committees, the Cabinet Office in relation to other departments, and you would within that account capture the changing character, priorities and dynamics of the government.

Q286 Lord Rowlands: Are you saying basically it is the personal chemistry and the political strength or weakness of the Prime Minister that is actually the determinant character of how these institutions operate and work?

Tessa Jowell: It is not the determinant and if it becomes the determinant you create a position of weakness; you create a position of weakness in the long term sustainability of policy. It is never a very good idea in government for policy to be owned by one person; you have to have a fact of shared responsibility across all the departments.

Q287 Lord Rowlands: Is that the lesson that has been learnt over the last 12 years?

Tessa Jowell: It is a fact that develops as a result of the maturity of a government.

Q288 Lord Norton of Louth: I want to follow up the point that you made about the centre earlier – you said the centre was primarily Number 10, the Cabinet Office and the Treasury and you touched upon some of the relationships in relation to Number 10 but only briefly in relation to the Treasury. Could you just tease out a little more what the relationship is between the Cabinet Office and the Treasury and to what extent that has actually changed over the past 12 years.

Tessa Jowell: There is, as I was saying earlier, this shared responsibility for public service reform and what was the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, now the delivery unit, which is based in the Treasury. It reports jointly but in fact the real axis is with Treasury and the whole public expenditure programme. What is the relationship? The relationship again changes over time; in the run-up to the Budget or the pre-Budget Report, in the context of a spending review obviously there are endless bilateral meetings between the Chancellor, the Chief Secretary and other secretaries of state and Number 10 will be very heavily engaged in that exercise and the character of the relationship between Number 10 and the Treasury in perhaps the first five years of a government is different from the relationship in the subsequent period that we are in now.

Q289 Lord Norton of Louth: The meetings that take place, would it be fair to characterise them as meetings of equals or is there a hierarchy?

Tessa Jowell: At official level there is a very high level of collaboration between the Cabinet Office and the Treasury. This is not the stuff of political poetry but there are meetings of the boards, both of the Cabinet Office and of the Treasury. The Commissioning Board which coordinates policy across these areas of shared interest and shared responsibility would be a

second, and then I have already referred to the fact that although the Public Services Unit which is responsible for the work on public service reform sits in the Cabinet Office it works to the Chief Secretary, so you can see all these interconnecting relationships which are important in making sure that the boundary between the Treasury and Number 10, the Treasury and the Cabinet Office, has a high level of osmosis going on all the time.

Chairman: The last question from Lord Rodgers.

Q290 Lord Rodgers of Quarry Bank: The Treasury has always been represented by official and ministerial Cabinet Committees; my question is, is the Cabinet Office represented in Cabinet Committees and if not – you have not got too many ministers spread around a very large number of Cabinet Committees – is there a possibility that there is a move away from ministers discussing issues about families, for example, to officials because so many matters are solved within the Cabinet Committees with so few ministers in the Cabinet Office. Is there not a transfer away from Parliamentary government to a different kind of government altogether?

Tessa Jowell: There is a very important point in your question and certainly I attend a very large number of Cabinet Committees but I do not attend all 46 Cabinet Committees – the management of all my responsibilities would be impossible if I did. This is where the machinery of government comes into play because the secretariat is provided by the Cabinet Office to all Cabinet Committees and I would certainly expect to be alerted were an issue to arise in a Cabinet Committee that I was not a member of or I had not attended for some reason that I ought to attend to. I would expect to be alerted in that way. You are right, there is an interaction here between the machinery of government which is the servicing of Cabinet Committees, securing decisions and disseminating those decisions and ensuring that departments take on their responsibility for implementing those decisions and the degree of political oversight. The political oversight in a way is not that the Cabinet Committees are

sovereign, but they do a very important job in supporting Cabinet government because important decisions from Cabinet Committees will come as recommendations before the whole Cabinet but with a degree of confidence that the arguments and the complexity of the difficulties will have been addressed in the discussion in Cabinet Committee and will be reflected in the recommended conclusion. The three major councils, for instance, that have been established in the last year – the National Economic Council, the Constitutional Reform Council and the Domestic Policy Council – I attend the Domestic Policy Council but yesterday spent quite a lot of time at a Cabinet Committee considering House of Lords reform which will make recommendations to the Constitutional Reform Council, no doubt, for further consideration there before recommendations come to the Cabinet.

Q291 Chairman: Minister, thank you so much for coming to be with us. There are a number of points that time has precluded us from raising and there are others that we would like to pursue in correspondence if we may. In the meantime thank you very much for coming.

Tessa Jowell: Thank you very much indeed and I will be delighted to supply any further information that you would like and also perhaps to answer the questions that time has not allowed for.

Chairman: Thank you very much indeed.