

Dear Jon,

Thank you for coming to our panel discussion event and for repeating your questions in your blog. I acknowledge there was not sufficient time to answer them in detail on the day, but happy to take them one by one.

1. On purdah, the Committee has made recommendations relating to purdah in the past and will be giving the matter active consideration again in the light of issues raised by the future EU referendum. The issue of purdah guidance around PCC elections was not raised as a specific issue by respondents to the inquiry. The Committee takes the view that it is important that local or central government resources and facilities are not perceived by the public to have been used for election campaigning or political purposes during an election period and that the political impartiality of employees is maintained. The Committee is aware of your blog post on this issue - as Lord Bew acknowledged on the day - and the Committee agrees it is something that should be considered seriously and quickly, particularly given the complexity of governance arrangements. We will be writing to the Home Office for an update on preparations being made for PCC elections.

2. Regarding primary legislation, the Committee is an advisory body. Many of our recommendations in this report do not require legislation. Based on the level of ethical risk the Committee felt the recommendation for the Home Secretary to conduct a review of powers to take action against a PCC was proportionate at this point. This does not rule out future legislation and the Committee will look for opportunities to maintain pressure. I agree Baroness Harris indicated an ongoing interest in this area.

3. On extra resources for police and crime panels we recognise this is one of the issues, the report discusses it in some detail, but we are under no illusions about the state of public finances. To make a recommendation solely on resources was not appropriate, especially as our inquiry that showed some Panels were able to operate effectively. Our intention is to drive best practise and encourage Panels and PCCs to look hard at their ways of working, and for Panels to provide greater continuity of representative membership and ensure they become more strategic using forward plans and advance notice of information needs, and for PCCs to adopt a common definition of significant public interest matters and improve the accessibility of the information they provide. The Committee recognised that this issue was common across local government scrutiny and may need revisiting across the sector as a whole.

4. On the need for a PCC Code of Conduct - the Committee's view is that there should be a mandatory national minimum code of conduct for PCCs in common with all other public office holders. While this could reflect the principles of the policing code we believe PCCs should have a code reflecting their own unique role within policing accountability. For the Committee the standards issue is that there should be clarity as to the standards of conduct and behaviour expected to provide a common yardstick for the public, as there is for MPs, civil servants, special advisers and Ministers.

5. Concerning police complaints - the evidence to the Committee showed there was confusion amongst the public and participants as to the various roles and responsibilities which was exemplified in both the system for complaints against the police and the system for complaints against PCCs. We made clear that this lack of clarity and transparency needed to be addressed in order for the public to have confidence in both systems. The police complaints system is already under review and the Committee has made clear that there is a gap in dealing effectively with non-criminal complaints against PCCs. The Committee expresses concern in the report about various aspects of the systems, including the role of the IPCC in complaints against PCCs.

6. Finally, the report discusses Ethics Committees in general and provides some case studies and further information. They are relatively new and their impact has not yet been properly evaluated, although some emerging findings are encouraging. The Committee is clear however that Ethics Committees are an adjunct and not an answer to embedding a standards culture. Whatever form they take they need clear terms of reference, and their effectiveness in supporting an ethical culture should be periodically reviewed.

We agree with you that the real dilemma is the opposing pull between national consistency of good governance practice and the localisation of accountability arrangements, even if we don't necessarily agree as to the best way to proceed at this point.

I'm afraid this is too long to post as a comment on your blog but I would be grateful if you would add my reply.

Lord Bew  
Chairman, Committee on Standards in Public Life