

Witness Statement of Baroness Bottomley of Nettlestone DL for the Leveson Inquiry

(Question 1):

The Rt Hon Baroness Bottomley of Nettlestone DL, C/o House of Lords, London, SW1A 0PW

Formerly Virginia Bottomley, MP for South West Surrey 1984 – 2005

Parliamentary Under Secretary to Department of the Environment

Minister for Health

Secretary of State for Health

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

House of Lords 2005

Trustee of the Economist Newspaper, NED Smith & Nephew and BUPA,

Chancellor of the University of Hull, Governor at LSE and Chair, Board Practice, Odgers Berndtson.

Question 2:

Shortly after I was appointed to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport as Secretary of State on the 5th of July 1995, I attended a Cabinet meeting or Cabinet committee to discuss the coordinated response to Sir David Calcutt's report. Having reviewed the papers and taken stock with colleagues and officials, I approved the response. My private secretary then, John Kingman, was closely involved in this as were the key relevant officials at the department. Much of the argument and thinking is set out in the 17th July, 1995 Parliamentary statement and supplementaries (Reference C).

[Provision of relevant papers and names of individuals should be obtained from the Department]

- a) Taking over in July 1995, I had little direct knowledge of the conditions prior to Sir David's report. There was confidence that John Wakeham, as Chairman of the PCC, was the man for the moment and would lead self regulation in an authoritative manner with, if necessary, greater menace than before.
- b) Whilst not happy about all elements of the regulatory system, it is always easier to identify problems than solutions. I did not want a solution which compounded the problems. Every approach requiring legal redress would effectively discriminate against those without financial resources. Defining what is in the public interest in statute is a highly complex task.
- c) Representations from the media, or any media interest, preceded my term of office. I was satisfied that they were properly taken into account by department officials. I had confidence in the team after reviewing and questioning the process and events before approving the response.
- d) I do recall any consultations made by or within Government. Stephen Dorrell may be able to give a more detailed answer.
- e) There is always concern about public confidence in the media. I wanted to redress the balance in relation to local press who rarely caused difficulties and are often overlooked in the debate.
- f) Parliamentarians sometimes have a particularly hard time from the media and this can affect their views on regulation. One occasion where statutory measures had been attempted to be brought into law, can be found in the document bundle relating to the Private Members Bill of Sir Patrick Cormack I faced some unforgivable

episodes personally but, like others, did not want to give further publicity to these by taking action.

- g) I believed all relevant issues were considered by me and by others when deciding not to implement the recommendation of the Report. Much serious attention had been given to this subject by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and by the government more widely.

Question 3:

Having not been party to the preparation for the Statement, I cannot recall this in detail but I was satisfied that Lord Wakeham, who is not to be trifled with, had got the measure of the role. There were lists of improved reforms and mechanisms. Detail relating to this question may be found in the document bundle which begins with a letter dated 22 January 1997 from Philip Stevens to myself [Reference: B] and also the Parliamentary statement (Reference C).

Question 4:

Thinking about the compensation fund preceded my arrival at DCMS. Stephen Dorrell, Lord Wakeham and the Department may be able to provide more information.

Question 5:

Further developments in the relationship between the Government and the PCC are set out in the correspondence between myself and Lord Wakeham on press self regulation 22nd January 1997 (reference C). If DCMS officials could identify further papers or the final version of the letter I sent, it would be helpful.

Question 6:

In my judgement the Government response to Sir David's report was the right response at the time. The press does not like being regulated externally. If anyone could convince them this was necessary, it was John Wakeham. Self regulation is a principle that I have always favoured. I recognise that the world can change. Now is a time to think again, though not necessarily to come to very different conclusions. Broken laws, rules, commitments or conventions do not demonstrate the need for more laws, rules, commitments or conventions; it can show the need for fewer breakages.

There may be a concern that the Human Rights Act may have effectively undermined self-regulation and the PCC.

Question 7:

I hope that the Commission and the Government has the balance, experience and wisdom to agree a system that can be used to establish standards and to protect the press. So that writers, editors, publishers and owners can maintain the obligation and the responsibility of the media to decide and to make available to all, accurate information on matters that they judge are important, interesting or entertaining, while the system provides for proper effective consideration of cases, problems, contravention and complaints.

We shall always need media that is free and responsible, able to decide and to publish fact and opinion as they, not we, decide.

I believe the facts stated in this statement are true.

Signed:

Dated: 30.04.12