

Administration Committee

Oral evidence: General Election Planning and Services, HC 209

Monday 20 June 2022

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Members present: Sir Charles Walker (Chair); John Cryer; Marion Fellows; Dame Maria Miller; Jessica Morden.

Questions 1-12

Witnesses

[I](#): Nick de Bois CBE, Stephen Gethins and Mr Mark Prisk.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Nick de Bois CBE, Stephen Gethins and Mr Mark Prisk.

Q1 Chair: Thank you, Nick, Stephen and Mark, for coming to talk to us. We are starting an inquiry on how the House can better welcome Members of Parliament, but also on how we can assist Members of Parliament in being good leavers and, when they leave this place, in having a rewarding and bright future—as bright and rewarding as the one that the three of you have discovered in your new life. First, before we start the questioning, can we go down the line, starting with Stephen, and ask you to give, in two minutes, your experience of leaving Parliament? Two of the three of you lost your seat; Mark stood down voluntarily. Explain what it is like to lose your seat and how you felt you were treated.

Stephen Gethins: All of us who go into politics and work in this place would be incredibly naive if we did not think at some point that there was a danger of losing our seat. That is the nature of democracy and politics. you go into every election, or should, very mindful of the shift in politics across the UK and thinking that it is a possibility.

That said, if you lose your seat, it's a tough experience. It is something that people have gone through for a long time. The stuff that people on the outside may not realise is that the House authorities, colleagues from across the political spectrum and colleagues locally, including from other political parties in my constituency, could not have been more helpful or more supportive. That is because although we might be in different political parties, when you campaign and you are in this place, you are in it together, despite your differences.

I came in in 2015 and left—lost—in December 2019. I am not sure that the House authorities and others, and in particular IPSA, were ready or prepared for the series of snap elections that we had. That is not entirely their fault; the rules were obviously in place for the Fixed-term Parliaments Act, which never quite came into effect in the way that was intended. Again, I am not making any judgment on that—it is just a reflection that we all have—but I am not sure the House authorities quite kept up with that.

At the other end, you have only two months to wrap things up; it is quick. I was fortunate, but I know others have been less fortunate, and I have to say I am not sure Parliament has kept up with the nature of politics outside, if that sounds fair. I know we have a lot to cover, and that colleagues—

Q2 Chair: Well, we can come back to that. Mark, you left of your own volition in 2019. Briefly talk us through that, and set the scene.



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Mr Prisk: In a funny sense, the 2019 election was not unexpected; by the late summer, it was felt that because of the impasse, we were going only one way: there had to be an election, be it that autumn or in the following spring. It felt as if we were coming up to that point.

I was getting to my mid to late 50s and had always wanted to do something else after politics, so I needed to make a decision. I decided at the beginning of September to give my association time to choose somebody they would like.

In a way, I was surprised that the House authorities were not quite where I would have expected them to be, in terms of preparation, information and communication. It is particularly difficult for staff. I made my own decision, so it was nowhere near as difficult as the situation faced by colleagues here. For staff, who are effectively being made redundant, it is a really difficult time. They are being asked to pack the boxes quickly, but also to think about their future. One of the important issues here is making sure that we do not lose sight of their needs and their concerns.

I was slightly torn. I had made my decision to leave, and I was looking forward to going, but I was sorry to be going in another sense. I found it difficult to juggle what staff needed to know, what I was allowed to say, when I was allowed to say it and who I was allowed to say it to. We might look at some of the tensions in the rules and regulations of the House and the legislation. That was my feeling.

Q3 **Chair:** Thank you. Nick, you left in 2015. Can you describe your experiences?

Nick de Bois: Well, I was certainly prepared for the possibility of defeat. I had come into Parliament at a relatively late age; I was just over 50 and I had a long career behind me, which had ups and downs in it. From a personal point of view, I was very realistic about what might happen. I prepared for that possibility without accepting that it was going to happen.

However, looking back, my principal concerns are—perhaps I am less forgiving than others—that the way we manage staff in the process is shameful, to the point that I do not believe that any credible private company would have such a lack of processes and support services for staff who are rather brutally made redundant overnight. It is just not acceptable. I find it deeply ironic that we make laws in this House telling everyone how to govern and respect their staff, and we just don't apply them, particularly as regards the redundancy process and helping our staff to get more work, so that was what I focused a lot of my attention on.

I am sure that we will talk about IPSA later. I thought their approach was rather clumsy at what was a sensitive time. Then there is the party element and how the party tries to conduct things. I left with a sense that it would be useful if those making decisions and rules about how ex-MPs and their staff should be handled went through the process themselves, and looked at it through the other end of telescope. There are a lot of



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human beings here; they are not just a process and an inconvenience to be dealt with quickly so that you can get on to the next Parliament.

- Q4 **Chair:** Before I bring in my two colleagues, may I ask a question? The ejection from this place can be brutal. As Stephen and Nick have described, it happens overnight. Do you think that the House and the political parties do enough to support former Members of Parliament into alternative careers? Do you think there is enough career advice while they are here? Do you think there is a role for outplacement advice in the event that they lose their seats or decide to leave voluntarily? I know that Mark now specialises in coaching; he might have a view on the desirability of that from a professional perspective. Stephen, what do you think?

Stephen Gethins: My party was fine, but this place is the employer. Nick was right to talk about staff; I know we are here to talk about MPs, but as you know, when an MP loses their job, the staff members lose their job as well. My staff members were fortunate, in that when I lost my seat, my party was on the up, and therefore staff members managed to find jobs. However, if there is a big cull of one party, which happens from time to time, given the nature of these things, it is really difficult for staff members.

IPSA talks about the six weeks prior to the election, but I do not need to tell you that six weeks before an election, you do not have much in the way of administration on your mind; it is about getting leaflets out, chapping on doors and doing all the normal stuff that you ought to be doing during an election campaign. It is the middle bit that is important: when you first come in, are you getting enough support when you employ members of staff? Are they aware of what they are getting into?

I was lucky to have a really talented and committed group of people working with me in the constituency office. It is very difficult for them to go out and seek alternative employment if they think that you are on the ropes. Emotionally, that is a very difficult thing for them to do, and something they might not want to do, because they will be committed to what you are seeking to do.

How we support staff for what may come next is an ongoing job for this House as the employer—they have all sorts of other rules as the employer. MPs come in at very different ages and with different backgrounds, so the situation differs from Member to Member, but if the offer was there, it would obviously be helpful.

- Q5 **Chair:** Mark, I will come to you last because of your professional experience in outplacement and coaching. Nick, what do you think? You had a family business, but you had lots of friends in Parliament, on both sides of the House, who lost their seats and have been in the same situation as you. What could you say on your behalf and theirs?

Nick de Bois: It is worth going to your first point about the party's response. The party's response is quite inadequate, but in a way I do not blame it, because the party is just made up of other MPs and people



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working at central office who are not experienced or trained in how to nurture and give advice to people who have lost their seats, either through choice or unexpectedly. That should be remedied.

The problem comes with the fact that in this House of Commons—this brilliant place—we are 650 people from extraordinarily different backgrounds, with different skills and expertise. I might be slightly more robust because of my background; inevitably I found myself offering support and time to other Members of my party who had lost their seats, and who were on their knees. They were absolutely shaken by the experience, and found that there was no one to turn to. That is a huge gap that I feel the party needs to address. It is perverse: it spends a fortune in time investing in us as MP candidates. To cut you adrift like that, although not everyone will need the support, is frankly rubbing salt into the wound. Make no mistake: when you leave the House of Commons, you are leaving a team. The difference is that you are cut off overnight. Your phone stops ringing pretty quickly. Friends are there, but there is not the support that some colleagues need.

Q6 Chair: There is nothing more ex than an ex-MP: we have often heard it since we arrived, and we will all hear it once we leave. Mark, give us an overview from a slightly different position. You left voluntarily and you are now in the business of coaching, outplacement and supporting people into work.

Mr Prisk: The House is quite good at dealing with the administration side of things, and that is it. That might be three months or six months. There is a failure—be it of the House or the political parties—to think about the person and the shift and transition in their life, which is quite significant. Some may argue that this is not unique, and that there are other roles that compare; I think the military might be a good comparator, but, my goodness, they have moved on. The military has a much stronger combination of structured learning and of transition, mentoring and coaching—of very much being there for its members.

Very often parliamentarians naturally feel quite lonely. I know that sounds unusual. I have always found that because you are in a very public place, Twitter will dissect everything you think, say or do, either intentionally or unintentionally. You develop a habit of putting up a big wall to admitting that you don't know something, or that you don't understand what the process of getting a job is now.

What is needed is not just careers advice in the technical sense—that is important—but working with the individual through the issues that they are dealing with and helping them make that difficult transition. That is something I deal with in the business and charity worlds. Sometimes it is about them trying to understand what their value is in the marketplace—what they can bring to employment. The difficulty, if you are a Member of Parliament, is that you do not run anything other than a small group of staff. Your ability to put on your CV “substantial executive experience” is quite limited. There are barriers there.



For me, the focus is on thinking about the people—the impact on them, and the mental health issues that come from that—and ensuring that there is a support mechanism. Then the focus should be on ensuring that for at least a year after people have left, there is somebody who they can turn to in confidence and have a genuine conversation with. That person will not necessarily know all the answers. I mentor, pro bono, some youngsters at the beginning of their careers, and part of it is about making sure that they do not make the big mistakes that are the career killers. However, it is also about being that sounding board for when someone wants to explore something, but they do not want to do it in public—in their case, that would be with investors, but in an MP's case, perhaps it is with potential employers. That personal side is really important.

Q7 John Cryer: A question occurs to me. I lost in 2005, and came back in 2010. This might have changed, but I found then that I was completely on my own. You said there is nothing more ex than an ex-MP. I was out there with no help and no assistance. I was in my 40s, so I was comparatively young to lose. Within a short time, I had four job offers. The Labour party was going backwards pretty rapidly by 2005; we were losing seats, and we lost a lot more in 2010. Is that the experience now—that you are just on your own? Obviously, you give help and advice, Mr Prisk; I suppose this is more a question for Nick and Stephen: did you find that there was help and assistance given by this place, or was it like what I had—you were out there on your own?

Stephen Gethins: Not really. I have to say that there were colleagues you could chat to informally—that was fine. I had the benefit of coming from a smaller party; the nature of the SNP means that it stands in Scotland, and so is a smaller party. That might have helped a little bit because our internal networks are smaller. I had a meeting with my party leader afterwards, and I was lucky enough to get a job quite soon afterwards. For staff members, that also helped.

Again, it is an unusual situation. John, you highlighted that the Labour party was going backwards. It is helpful to remember that every party goes up at some point and then comes back down again. Everyone who has been around for a little while will have experienced both. I was fortunate, in the sense that my party was on the up at the time, so I was in a slightly unusual situation. I wonder what would have happened had my party been on a downwards trajectory. I was the only one. From a party perspective, I received support.

From this place, there was informal support, but there was nothing baked in. To be fair to officials, they didn't really have anything to follow—there is nothing about reaching out to an ex-MP a month afterwards and how to steer them through redundancies. It was just before Christmas as well. We had some difficulty with the office that we might touch on later on.

We have to remember that each individual has a different perspective. I know that there are no female former colleagues here, but they would have a particular perspective on this issue. Everybody comes with a different perspective. Regardless, a big organisation should be able to deal



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with lots of people with different backgrounds. That is the nature of any big organisation. This is a big employer. I think it is less good at dealing with employees—not just former Members, but former members of staff—than other organisations that have to make people redundant. Even external organisations might be an area where some lessons could be drawn.

Nick de Bois: I imagine the big difference between 2005 and now is that MPs are not actually very attractive to employ. The brand of an MP is not in a good place—wrongly, in my opinion. There is that added burden when you are trying to look for work. I have only heard that second-hand—it wasn't my experience, because I was in different circumstances.

On the help that is available, I have not heard of anything substantive for any colleagues. Picking up on the point Stephen made, in 2015, when we lost, the Conservatives were returned with a majority, so you were in this perverse position where it was very easy to forget about you. There was no collective doom. It was as though everyone back down here from the Conservative party was having a party and you hadn't been invited. That has pretty much set the tone for any help or support that some people chose and tried to seek out.

A number of marvellous colleagues and friends tried to give advice and help, but that wasn't structured; that was friendship.

Mr Prisk: I would endorse that. There is informal mentoring—I did a fair bit between 2005 and 2010, when I was here. That was partly because, at that stage—this was my perspective—there were people who were looking to come here and struggling to get through the selection process. There were also people who were here who were struggling with a number of different issues. Just being available and being there to have a quiet, confidential word about whatever they wanted to talk about was important. However, that is ad hoc and informal, and it is not adequate.

Unless things have changed in the past couple of years—I suspect the fact that you have all been absent from here during the pandemic has made things more isolated for many people, and worse in that sense—then there is actually still a problem. I am drifting now into existing Members—

Chair: No, you are not. I wanted to pick up on that, Mark. I know a number of colleagues who were elected in 2017 in particular, but not exclusively, who then lost their seat in 2019. Within weeks, we were in lockdown, and many of them struggled to find a job.

I will just say, for the record, that this is a very difficult subject. Lots of the people we asked did not want to join us to talk about this subject. We asked a number of women panellists—former colleagues—and they just did not want to do it. We will try to meet them in private. Please, anybody watching this, do not read into the fact that we have three men. We did invite female former colleagues, and we will continue to try to get them to come and talk to us in whatever capacity is most comfortable to them.



Q8 Dame Maria Miller: Thank you all for coming today. It is incredibly helpful to hear from you as we do this piece of work. You are the people who have lived through it. I would like to look in particular at the details of the process, which you have started to hint at in your answers. The process of leaving this place, whether you are an MP or a staff member, should reflect the reality of leaving it. At the moment, from what you are starting to hint at, there is a big disconnect.

Stephen, you were talking in particular about Dissolution guidance being issued when you are distracted by elections, and I take it that the non-returned Members' reception is held in Parliament, which seems extraordinarily wrong. Could you just think about the particular details of the process—how they work at the moment, and how you might change them?

I am also struck by the period of financial support for Members, particularly given the change in the law around removing the Fixed-term Parliaments Act and going back to a far more potentially unpredictable holding of elections. What do you think about that and the support that should be in place, rather than what is currently in place? Think about that detailed process. Who would like to go first?

Nick de Bois: First of all, I was unaware of a non-returned Members' reception being held. I don't think that happened in 2015—if it did, I did not get the invite.

Sensitivity is lacking in the whole process. Having started and founded a company, I have been in the unfortunate position where there were times that I had to make people redundant—always as a result of economic circumstances or whatever; it was never their fault—and it is an extremely difficult situation. I come back to this, because it must be fixable: I found myself in a position where the first letter I received, probably within two days of losing the election, was from IPSA, who basically said, "Sorry you're not going back, but just to let you know, there will be no final payment made to you until you do the following. Furthermore, none of your staff will get their payments until you all do the following." In theory, that is just unreasonable, because if you make someone redundant in your office, you give them their money and you wish them well. You do not start putting down conditions like that.

That process also created an artificial tension, because you probably need two months, if you are lucky, to wind down an office properly—to sort out your leases and so forth. Now, there will be some MPs who will need their severance payment within 30 days, and they cannot have it, nor can their staff—although the staff would be paid. You are going to end up with the tension of the MP wanting to wind things up as quickly as possible so that he or she gets their money, and IPSA will push back against that. Of course, the staff could probably have done a thorough job for two months in the time they are looking for a job. Stupid processes like that, at a very stressful time for everyone, should be looked at.

Q9 Dame Maria Miller: As a point of information, what conditions are put on MPs?



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Nick de Bois: Basically, every single bill had to be paid. Whether it was your electricity bill, your gas bill or your lease, it had to be sorted. Those sorts of things are not easy to negotiate and sort out—particularly leases, by the way, even if you had break clauses and had planned ahead. All those conditions had to be met, and they are not the sorts of things that you as an employee would have faced if you were made redundant from a business. There are processes around that that are, I think, extremely easy to fix and should be looked at, unless they have been changed already.

I also think the support offer from the House could be much better for an MP who will instinctively want to secure the future of his or her staff—again, at a very stressful time. There could be a central repository for sharing information about recommended staff so that new Members coming in could perhaps go and recruit them. In fact, I wrote a letter to my colleagues and all of my staff were snatched up. It was fantastic, but is that really what we should expect an MP to do when they are literally trying to wind down everything, including the cases they are handling in their constituency, and get their own life back on record as well? No. It can be supported and helped with some common-sense structures.

The thing that would be most helpful—Mark has talked about that—is that at every election there is somebody in every party who has to go through the process, so why is that person not encouraged, or at least asked, to have a role in being available to help and guide those unfortunate MPs?

I will be blunt about this, although I know that sometimes discretion is the better part of valour. I remember that after the unsuccessful—I suppose that is how some would describe it—2017 election for the Conservatives, there were a number of candidates who may have reasonably expected to be returned but were not. I contacted the Chief Whip's office and said, "Why don't we put something like this in place?" It is not really the Chief Whip's job to do it, but the experience of seeing those things means that there are, I think, simple solutions that can be done.

Mr Prisk: The Dissolution guidance was good on the whole, in terms of content. I think it could have come earlier and perhaps without dates. As often happens in any organisation, they try to get the exact, perfect, finished article. Actually, what most people want is three quarters of the information, so that they can crack on with that. The actual dates can come later. That would have been more helpful. I wonder whether you could widen that in terms of the Q and A, and maybe there could be an online chat for that.

From my point of view, the House service was on the whole fine. IPSA, on the other hand, was wholly unprepared. It was bureaucratic and unresponsive—the glorious combination that nobody wants to have to deal with. My impression was that it had made the mistake of overhauling its computer programme while also cutting back on its contact centre. As the person trying to deal with IPSA, and when something went wrong on the computer system, even though it had agreed by email that those entries



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were erroneous, it could not change the system, and I could not talk to anybody.

I ended up having to go up to the Strand on numerous occasions in person in order to try to sort this out—not just for me but, as Nick rightly says, for my staff. That was the bit that grated. I had made a decision to leave, so it was easier for me, but that does not mean that staff members should find that there is a question and a delay and an uncertainty about what their future is going to be.

There were a number of other issues with the IPSA process, but they combined being detached from what actually was happening here. I remember having one bizarre conversation. When we finally got through to the call centre after 27 minutes, as I recall, I explained that there was an election coming and that we needed the information quickly. The soul on the other end said, “What election?” Your heart sinks at that moment when you just know that the next three hours of your life are going to melt away, because you are going to have to go back to square one. I don’t blame the individual. The management of that organisation were clearly not equipping the staff with what they needed to know in order to do their job. There are other elements that were very stressful for my staff. I felt that IPSA did not really know what was going on at all.

Stephen Gethins: There is so much on this to cover, and I do not want to cover too much. I know we will deal with this a bit in private, but I spoke to my former constituency team before I came down today, just to have a chat and ask them for their reflections, which I am sure none of the Committee members will mind. One of them referred to IPSA as being the single worst experience of working in a parliamentary office.

There is a question to be asked on the redundancy side of it. Redundancy is supposed to help people transition from one job into the next. It is meant to help them out, as in any organisation. I do not think I got mine back for, I think, almost a year, because there were some difficulties. I had to go to the ombudsman about some difficulties with payments. That means that what they were doing was holding that money because they do not quite trust the people. So what is it for? Is it there in the same way as you put down on a deposit on a flat, or is it redundancy? If it is for redundancy, it performs a very different job from being a deposit. I think that that needs to be looked at.

One of my frustrations with IPSA was that I was having to get those meetings on the Strand, and I was having to fly down from Scotland to do it, because of course I am not based in London. That is an added frustration. You have extra costs. I had a flat in London and the landlord, who was lovely, was about to lose his rent. That was fine, because we managed to get that into the deposit. I had very significant difficulties over the office, because the guidance had changed halfway through our rental, which IPSA was not willing to take into account.

Getting through to people to speak to them was very, very difficult, and you were treated as if you were independently wealthy. Therefore, where



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there was a dispute, be it in terms of office payments or something else, you were expected to pay for that and collect it later. Now, paying thousands of pounds up front when you have just lost your job is not something that everybody can afford, but IPSA was treating people as if they were independently wealthy.

I think that was a cultural thing that, again, didn't take it into account that the rules were there for the Fixed-term Parliaments Act, which we only really had for the period from 2010 to 2015. Of course, during the period, which you will all remember—I am sure very fondly—from 2015 through to 2019, there was always the prospect of an election. It doesn't take that set of circumstances into account.

Finally, the Fixed-term Parliaments Act has been repealed. The Prime Minister can call a general election at a time of his choosing, so I wonder whether now is the time to revisit some of that.

Q10 Dame Maria Miller: I have just a tiny question. Roughly how many months after the election did it take you to close down everything?

Mr Prisk: Eight months.

Stephen Gethins: About the same.

Nick de Bois: About five.

Chair: That is really helpful. Jessica.

Q11 Jessica Morden: I think you have covered this, because your answers have been so comprehensive. The experiences you have recounted are certainly ones that people from 2019 have told me about, particularly the point about whether the money is a redundancy payment or a deposit. I certainly came across someone who was chased over a piece of equipment they had given back many years before and all their money was withheld. The other point is about doing all this and dealing with the trauma of it while your staff are trying to look for other jobs. I think that point is really important as well.

To build on your answers to the questions, what support and training do you think should be there? Was there anything for staff to transition on as well? The other question I am interested in is how much face-to-face contact there was. How easy was it to get in touch with IPSA? I think you have alluded to this, but did you have a person who was looking after you? Did you have any face-to-face meetings at all?

Chair: You are giving very full answers, but can we try to shorten them? I ask purely because we will get Marion in and then we will go into the private session, where we have a little bit of time, but I know, Stephen, you have to get a plane or something.

Stephen Gethins: I can touch on some of that in the private session.

Chair: So let us run through these questions quite quickly.



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Nick de Bois: Okay, I will set the pace. I had absolutely appalling contact with IPSA—it really was. I have nothing to add to that, really. I think that, for the staff, it is such an obvious answer but there could be an online resource; there could be a chat resource, as Mark said, to expand it further. At every end of Session, people are going through the same issues that we have had before. It really could make a big difference.

Mr Prisk: I endorse that. I think the staff association and the House could facilitate good information for staff members online, and maybe mentoring among the senior members and junior members. In terms of personal contact or information—none. I think what IPSA fails to do—this is something that any good organisation that recognises it has customers and thinks about it in this way does—is to have somebody allocated to you, who maybe deals with 20 or 30 Members. But they had removed that cost and put the staffing elsewhere, they had spent too much money on the computer, and they ended up with a nightmare.

Stephen Gethins: I will say this very briefly. By the time you get to the Dissolution of Parliament, it is too late. This is something that really needs to be done beforehand. Everybody here knows how much you rely on your staff. You know how overstretched parliamentary staff are. And then, when they go into an election, very few of them are going into an election and sitting back and just letting the electoral process happen. They are often involved in their private time—understandably—as well. So this is a job that needs to span the whole of a Parliament and not just the period of Dissolution, because by then it is too late.

Chair: Marion.

Q12 **Marion Fellows:** It feels cheeky to start asking questions. Apologies but—speaking of staff—I had a clash in my diary and an appointment that I couldn't not go to.

As a Whip, I witnessed some trauma experienced by Members who did not get support. No one comes into Parliament expecting to be there for life—they expect churn and change—but Parliament could do better. The IPSA side is really important, and I agree with everything I have heard these gentlemen say so far, but how is it now? How long do the scars last for? Do they last? We cannot go on doing this to former MPs.

Nick de Bois: For me, the glass is definitely half-full. I genuinely still think this is the best Parliament in the world. It is taking a lot of hits, but I do not come here with anything but a sense of “we can do better.” I hope that is what comes out of it. I did have an advantage, though. For me, it was rather cathartic to go and write a book, and I felt a lot better after that.

Mr Prisk: I wasn't booted out, if my colleagues here will pardon that expression. I made a choice, so it is much easier for me. It leaves a bitter taste because if the next generation say, “I'm thinking of going into Parliament—what do you think?”, you want to be able to be enthusiastic. I am, but I know that some of the processes can be soul-destroying and people's mental health here is often not something we address as we



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should. Some Members here are very good at making sure that is addressed, but it is an issue because it is calling into question whether or not you are professional enough to be here. That is what that can do.

Stephen Gethins: I noticed that you were kind enough to refer to Members who were not returned, rather than Members who were booted out; that was very tactful of the Committee and, as usual, the excellent Clerks.

Nick will not be surprised to hear me say that I do not think this is the best Parliament in the world, for a range of reasons, one of which is that there are other things that can be learned. For example, I had staff members who went on to work with MSPs—it would be the same in Wales or Northern Ireland—and all the members of staff who have worked in both Parliaments have said that they find the Scottish Parliament much more straightforward. It didn't matter if you were incoming or outgoing; you could always get through to somebody. That may reflect the size of the Parliament or the fact it came into being in 1999, so it started afresh.

Before we go into private session, I will say that I think there are things that can be learned from the other Parliaments; not everything, as they are different. When the Scottish Parliament came into being, it looked at some things that Westminster did well and took those, but there were other areas that started afresh. That is an administrative not a political thing. There are things worth looking at in the devolved Administrations, not least the relationship between the MP and the contracts employing people. That comes out if MPs have to leave Parliament.

Chair: Thank you. We will now go into private session. You all said the word "better" quite a few times, so perhaps the take-away from this is that if you want better MPs, you have to treat MPs better.