

Administration Committee

Oral evidence: [Health and Wellbeing](#), HC 937

Tuesday 14 October 2025

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Nick Smith (Chair); Mr Alex Barros-Curtis; Bob Blackman; Bambos Charalambous; Mary Glendon; Carolyn Harris; Navendu Mishra; Tessa Munt; Kirsteen Sullivan.

Questions 29 - 74

Witnesses

[I](#): Wes Auvache, Contract Manager, Westminster Gym; Jon Giles, Chief Executive Officer, Jubilee Hall Trust; Lauren Kirk, Manager, Westminster Gym.

[II](#): Al Carns MP; Marcus Hudson, former member of staff for Al Carns MP.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jon Giles, Wes Auvache and Lauren Kirk.

Q29 Chair: Welcome to the Administration Committee on Tuesday 14 October, in Committee Room 6. This is our second session on health and wellbeing. Our first panel today will talk about the Westminster Gym, and we welcome them. I am Nick Smith, Chair of the Administration Committee. Thank you for coming to our Committee. Today we are looking at how the gym supports the physical and mental health of our parliamentary community. We welcome our guests, Jon Giles, Wes Auvache and Lauren Kirk, who I invite to introduce themselves.

Wes Auvache: Good morning, everyone. My name is Wesley Auvache. I am the parliamentary logistics manager in the House of Commons and the senior contract manager. I have worked for the House Service for 15 years, and for the last eight years I have been managing the gym contract. I am also a mental health first aider and a keen recreational long-distance runner.

Jon Giles: I am Jonathan Giles, chief executive of Jubilee Hall Trust. I have been with the charity for 23 years, and I have been working within the parliamentary estate for approximately 19 of those years, overseeing the Westminster Gym. I joined the not-for-profit sector—the trust sector—because I fundamentally believe in reinvesting the funds generated from health and fitness into community activity; I am quite passionate about that. I have a background in sport science. I am a mental health first aider, a menopause champion and a safeguarding champion in the workplace.

Lauren Kirk: Morning, everyone. My name is Lauren Kirk. I have been with the charity for two years. I transitioned into management in May this year for the Westminster Gym. I started this career about two years ago. I have always been passionate about fitness, and in the last year and a half, I have been really passionate about influencing other people to be passionate about fitness, so that is why I am here now.

Q30 Chair: Thank you for that. Jon, can you tell us more about Jubilee Hall Trust?

Jon Giles: Jubilee Hall Trust has been established in Covent Garden for almost 50 years. It was set up primarily to improve the health and wellbeing of its local community. Since its inception, we now operate sites in Hampstead—Belsize Park—in Southwark near the OXO Tower, and here. Our fundamental belief is that people should have access to physical activity, and we try not to make cost a barrier to that. We run subsidised classes, and offer subsidised membership fees for those who cannot afford to be a member of a physical activity space, and we sell premium memberships to those who can.

We have been a member of Community Leisure UK, formerly Sporta, for over 20 years. Community Leisure UK is the membership council for the trust sector, representing all leisure trusts in the UK. In 2024, Community Leisure UK reported 5.4 million unique user visits to the trust sector, generating over £1.59 billion in social value. Our sector reinvests its money back into community activity and helps to support those in the top 4% of social deprivation to get access to physical activity in open, inclusive spaces. I am sure I will come on to more as the session goes on.

- Q31 **Chair:** Over to you, Lauren. I have a bunch of questions here; I will pitch them at you, and we will see how we go. As you have day-to-day experience, I would like you to talk about the membership and usage of the gym. Can you tell us about the pricing options? Is it possible to do weekly passes? How many members are there, broken down by gender and age?

Lauren Kirk: Our gym has a couple of options for memberships. We have direct debit and annual memberships. Direct debit is £40 a month. We have an off-peak membership as well, which is £30 a month. You can also add £5 each month to include towel hire—

- Q32 **Chair:** Sorry to interrupt you, but I do not know what you mean by “off-peak”.

Lauren Kirk: It means that instead of being able to use the gym for the full opening hours, you can use it only between 9 am and 12 pm and between 2 pm and 5 pm. It is £10 cheaper a month.

You can add £5 to each membership to include towel hire. For our annual membership, that is £440 a year. We have an off-peak annual as well, which is £320. You can also be a casual user—you do not have to have a membership. That is £10 every time you want to use the gym, or you can do a block session and have 10 sessions for £74.

Moving on to the usage of the gym, our ratio of male to female is 74% male gym users and 26% female users. Our average age is 41 and our largest age group is between 26 and 35.

We do not currently have weekly passes. However, if there is a demand for them, it is an option we can consider. At the moment, we have our casual membership, which seems to benefit a lot of people, but a weekly pass is definitely an option.

- Q33 **Chair:** I have a few more questions about the details. How many of your members are MPs and peers? Do you know how many new Members elected in 2024 have joined the gym?

Lauren Kirk: We have no official stats for how many MPs and peers we have as we do not take that information on signing up. We gathered some information, and I can tell you that 13 MPs have used the gym at least at one point in 2025, although we do not know whether they are members or just casual users.

- Q34 **Chair:** But you do not know how many new Members have joined?



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Lauren Kirk: We do not know how many new Members have joined. We do know that our largest joining rate was in October 2024, when we had 71 new members. Our largest joining rate since then has been only 49 members, which was this January. We peaked last October with a significant number of new joiners, which I am assuming was due to the election.

Q35 **Chair:** What does the usage look like in a typical sitting week in Parliament? What are the peak usage periods? Do you think the current opening hours are meeting the needs of MPs and staff?

Lauren Kirk: I think the current hours meet their needs. Our opening times correlate with the sitting times. Our busiest times are 5 pm and 7 am, so during those times the gym is at its busiest. There is slight crowding in the male changing rooms, just because of the high number of male users compared with female users. From looking at the statistics, I know that we also have users coming in between 6 am and 7 am, and the last hour of the day—between 8 pm and 9 pm—sees our lowest rate of users in the gym. In the future, we could potentially think about opening the gym earlier; I know from members' feedback that there is a demand for earlier opening times, so that could be an option.

Q36 **Chair:** I think I asked this question, but did not take a note of it. Did you say how many members you had?

Lauren Kirk: We have 560 members who are on a direct debit or an annual membership, and then we have 22 casual users who just use the gym on a casual basis.

Q37 **Chair:** This is my last question, although Tessa and Kirsteen might want to come in. How well attended are the fitness classes? Can you pay as you go? Are there going to be more or different types of classes? Can you promote classes to specific passholder categories to encourage people to come as a team, or MPs to come in groups to try things out or just work out together?

Lauren Kirk: We can hold only eight people in our studio anyway, so our class numbers are quite low. At the moment we have a class timetable, but we are thinking of adapting it. In the future, we do not want to have just classes; we are thinking of having educational workshops to help people to get into fitness, weight training, nutrition and anything like that—that is the vision at the moment.

Casual users can also go to the classes, although they do not have the same benefits as gym members, as gym members can book a week in advance. Casual users cannot do that, but they can still use our app to see the availability of the class and how many spaces there are, and they can book themselves in on the day. Luckily, our classes are hardly ever fully booked, so most casual users are able to get a space in the class.

You mentioned specific categories, and I would encourage that. I think that is a great way to get people to come down and use our classes and studio. At the moment, a lot of our classes are at lunch time, which does



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not suit a lot of people. Due to our lone working, we cannot do morning classes at the moment, which is where the demand is. We are thinking of getting external instructors to come in and do morning classes for us. That obviously is not the reality right now, but it is a future goal.

At the moment, we have a really good community down there, with groups and teams of colleagues coming down and going to classes together at lunch time. We also have, for example, Wates Construction. They book a yoga or spin class with us outside of the timetable, and they request to use our studio and have a class to suit their availability. Moving forward, we could definitely have the option for people to book specific classes for their teams, or we could have something on the timetable for specific passholders—that is definitely something we can do.

Q38 Kirsteen Sullivan: I was just wondering about the additional services that you have available. I know that there are some treatments and therapies available. Are those available to non-members of the gym, and how are they promoted? I personally have not seen that much, and there could be demand there.

Lauren Kirk: Definitely. At the moment, it is just promoted in the gym. You can use these services without being a gym member. Technique Health and Fitness runs the physiotherapy in the gym. They offer 15% if you use their code in the gym, but as a casual user, you can still come in, use that code and get discounted physiotherapy. We should probably find a way to promote that better throughout the estate. The other services that we offer—the classes on the timetable—would be as a gym user. Whether you are a member or a casual user, you would have to be a paying member of the gym to use those services.

Q39 Kirsteen Sullivan: But the additional therapies and treatments are open to everyone?

Lauren Kirk: Yes.

Kirsteen Sullivan: I think it would be helpful to see them advertised more widely.

Lauren Kirk: Yes, definitely.

Q40 Tessa Munt: My questions are probably for Jon, although I recognise that you might not be on top of all the day-to-day workings. I have been speaking over the months to a number of our staff members, who are not the best paid people in the world, as I am sure you will understand. I have concerns about cancellation charges, and what the staff refer to as extra charges. I have two particular situations, but I want to understand this first: our staff are told that there is a cancellation month needed to protect the Jubilee Hall gym due to its charity status. What does that mean?

Jon Giles: We do not like contracts. We try to stay away from contracts. The way we have a membership from point of joining is that people pay a double direct debit on their first payment. On their first payment to the charity as a member, they pay twice. One month is for the month they are using, and that will roll on forward, and then one month is held as their

cancellation month. When a customer cancels, effectively, they cancel and have another month to use the facility. The challenge we face is that, if someone has been with us a long period of time or wants to cancel, they often want to cancel and then leave straight away. They have allocated that month's payment in hand.

We have another situation where we run our membership on direct debit. With the direct debit instruction, there is a date by which you have to send the direct debit to the bank. If someone misses that cut-off date, we already make the collection. There is sometimes a period when someone wants to cancel, and we have already collected their membership fees, and they also then hold this membership on account. We will always give a refund to those people who need to cancel last minute, of course we would—we do not like contracts at all.

It may be that staff are articulating it to the customer in a way that they feel is the best approach, but essentially, the one month paid in notice is held on to account for their one month in lieu, and there is a cut-off period for membership that we could probably noticeboard better to people. In all situations, we will always give a refund to the customer. Of course, there is a process to protect the charity but, as we will come on to later, the payments from those customers are not going into my charity; they are going into a pot of money that is used to run the Westminster Gym.

Q41 Tessa Munt: But they are told that the cancellation month is needed to protect the Jubilee Hall gym due to its charity status. I do not understand what that means.

Jon Giles: That may just be the way that the team are presenting it to the customer. That is something we will take back and talk to them about.

Q42 Tessa Munt: One of our staff joined the gym on 26 March, and they paid £49.03 to cover the remaining days of March and the full month of April. They cancelled their membership on 30 April—the end of April—but apparently, the key date seems to be the 20th of the month, which seems to be a continuous thing that keeps coming back. The cancellation having been made after the 20th, they were then charged for the following month, and they were billed £81.90 on 1 May to cover May and the cancellation month. On 1 June, they were charged an additional £40.95 for June, as the gym requires a minimum membership of two full months. Admittedly, after they complained, the June charge was refunded. However, they still paid £130.93 for 34 days of gym use, which is quite steep for ordinary staff.

Jon Giles: I totally agree, Tessa, and thank you for raising it. I will look into that point personally and I will report back to you on it. I will speak to the site staff on it to make sure we are doing that properly.

Q43 Tessa Munt: It does not quite fit with the charity's social mission, does it? You have made comments about ensuring that it is accessible.

Jon Giles: Quite right; I totally agree. When someone is joining, the 20th of the month cut-off is about setting up a new direct debit with a bank.



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When they join after that setting-up period, which is the 20th—the collection is three days later—they pay pro rata for the month in hand and the month ahead. In their first direct debit, which would then be six weeks later in that case, they pay a double direct debit. They are paying that one month in hand, along with their month for, in this situation, May. When they give notice to cancel, they have technically paid that month in hand, which would then be, in this case, June. That is us just making sure that the customer understands what payments they have made and for what period, but fundamentally making sure that, if that customer wants to leave, we fully support that. I will take away the comms to staff on that.

Chair: It sounds like a fairly complicated individual case.

Q44 **Tessa Munt:** No, this is a pattern. I have chosen one of several, and I have one more that I would like to go into—forgive me. It might be helpful if everybody understood that the key date is the 20th of the month. It would be really helpful for people to understand what they are going to be charged and how it is going to work.

I have another person who wanted to pause their gym membership in June ahead of the summer recess. They were told they could not pause it for July, as they asked after 20 June. When they returned in July to cancel their membership for August, they were told that was not possible because the manager was on holiday.

Both of those situations were caught up with the manager being away—forgive me for talking about you; it is not very fair—and I wonder whether it is the case that that authority needs to be delegated. If only the manager can make a decision about something, and someone goes in and cannot talk to anybody—you have to have time off and holiday, I understand that—perhaps you need a deputy manager who has the authority, or more management cover somehow, so that staff can talk to somebody when they turn up. Do you have a view?

Jon Giles: Absolutely, I do. First, thank you for bringing this to my attention. Customer service is critical for us and somewhere along the line, we are just not delivering that in the very best way possible. Allow me time to go and speak to the staff on site. To me, this is a full staff review, so that all members of staff can handle any inquiry straightaway. We try to run an organisation where our people on site should be making those decisions. I think that is just about me making sure that we have that training in place and people understand that. It is also about making sure that what we publicise to people about cut-off dates is well publicised and well explained.

Q45 **Tessa Munt:** It is certainly the case, in my experience from having spoken to people about this, that you cannot do anything before the 20th of the month, and you cannot do anything after the 20th of the month. You have to be there on the 20th, and that is not realistic.

Jon Giles: It isn't, and it isn't realistic either. I think it is just the fact that we need to articulate that better, and I do not think we have done a good enough job of that—clearly.



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Q46 Tessa Munt: The last comment I have is a direct quote—not my wording—but there was quite a lot of concern about everything being “a bit of a faff”. For ordinary, pretty low-paid staff—you can charge the MPs what you like, as far as I am concerned, because we earn a reasonable salary—the whole business of extra charges was a real put-off to potential gym users. It is probably about clearer communication and an absolutely clear idea of what you are in for if you are joining up to the gym.

Jon Giles: I totally agree.

Tessa Munt: Thank you very much, and the Committee will look forward to hearing from you further.

Q47 Mary Glendon: Could you please tell us how you survey the membership to get feedback on current services and potential changes to services?

Lauren Kirk: At the moment, we do not have any surveys for current users of the gym. We have feedback forms, so when members cancel, they can give feedback. I get a lot of feedback via email, and through the House of Commons compliments, complaints and comments system that people can use. Moving forward, we want to be more proactive in encouraging current users to give feedback. At the moment, the vision of the gym is changing, and once we have a clearer picture of what that is, we can ask for more specific feedback on what people want, whether that is classes, opening times and stuff like that.

Q48 Mary Glendon: So there is a commitment to do that. Wes, can I ask you something specifically? How much does Parliament subsidise the gym?

Wes Auvache: The House is contractually obliged to compensate Jubilee Hall Trust for any losses it incurs from operating our gym. In the previous financial year of 2024-25, that compensation was £25,000, and those losses are predominantly due to membership numbers not being at a level that allows the service to be self-sufficient.

Q49 Mary Glendon: Is there the potential to partner with other gyms so that users, especially MPs who spend part of their working week in their constituency, can pay one membership for use on two sites?

Wes Auvache: If you are a member of the gym here in Westminster, you can use three other gyms within London, but not beyond that. The gyms in Hampstead, Southwark and Covent Garden, which Jon mentioned earlier, are the current level that is offered within the London area, but not beyond that to other constituencies.

Q50 Mary Glendon: Maybe that was a little too hopeful, but we had to ask it. Jon, how financially viable is the gym to operate, and what challenges do you face?

Jon Giles: It is a difficult contract to manage for financial viability. It may come back to Tessa’s original point about the staff talking about protecting the charity, as they are more talking about trying to make sure that what the House is writing off as our debt position is reduced. We have not made a surplus at Parliament for the last seven years, and that is for a number



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of reasons. We know that live membership is low at circa 500, and we are a London living wage employer, so staff employment rates are in keeping with the London living wage.

Coming back to Kirsteen's point about marketing, we really are challenged by the way in which we can market the facility across the estate. I think that might be because we are perceived as a commercial organisation working within Parliament, and therefore marketing membership sales or selling a product might be perceived as unfair marketing against other people who may have a private contract or a contract within the estate.

If we were a service, and we were able to talk about wellbeing services across the estate, we would be talking much more openly talking about getting people and customers into the facility, and I think we would have a much better approach to signposting people to the location. There is a significant number of people who have been an employee of the House for a long time who do not know that the gym is there, and I am still amazed that people do not know the facility is there. If you were to walk through Portcullis House or any other corridor within the estate, you will not find signage steering people to Westminster Gym, or a gym facility.

The team is really good at trying to find ways in which we can do this. We have had examples where we have created little table stands in Portcullis that talk about healthy eating and have a free pass on them. We have had boards in corridors around Parliament—much like the screens here—on which we may have something pop up for 30 seconds, and then another infographic comes up. In terms of a strategic approach to—I do not want to say marketing the space—making people aware of the wellbeing provision, it is heavily restricted.

Q51 Mr Barros-Curtis: Jon, following up on that point, you talked about presenting yourself as a service rather than a commercial, profit-making enterprise. What are the limitations that prevent you from doing that now and pivoting to that wellbeing space, which may pick up membership numbers and footfall?

Jon Giles: I think price is still a barrier. Although we charge reasonable rates, the parliamentary community is a community of people that represents society as a whole, with people on lower earnings to those on significantly higher earnings. People on lower earnings may have a choice between their home life and affording to pay a £30 gym membership. If we approach the community of Parliament like any other community outside, we need to make provision for these people to access physical activity. Cost is not a barrier to that.

Because I am always trying to be mindful of us breaking even or reducing the cost to Parliament of that contract within it, we have to make decisions where staff teach classes as part of their shift, so that we are not paying external instructor costs, which are £25 to £30 an hour. To put back in morning classes, for instance, we need to find an instructor who is teaching at £25 an hour. That person would come out and teach a one-hour class—a lot of people will not come out for a one-hour, £25 session.



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We need to build a case to try to bring those services back in. If our approach was much more that this is service to the House, it is not cost—we are improving the lives of parliamentary employees and therefore reducing the cost of conditions due to inactivity, and we are reinvesting that money now and we will see a long-term saving in reduced access to GP services, days off sick and poor mental health.

- Q52 **Mr Barros-Curtis:** That is really helpful. I guess what I am trying to drive at is, what is prohibiting you from doing that now? Is it a contractual limitation with the House, because somehow it would trip into the effective indemnity that the House is giving you for an income shortfall and operating cost? Is it something else? Or is it nothing, and that is something that you could do, but it has to be part of a broader strategy about where the balance lies? Do you offer more packages for people who have lower salaries to encourage them along, in order to get the offset of costs that you talked about? Is that something that you could do now and are looking at, could do now and are not looking at, or cannot do now? If it is the last, what is the reason?

Jon Giles: When we write the budget, we try to show that the income that we are generating from memberships at the membership rate that we think we can sell it for covers the operational costs, including staff salaries, and what comes out of the bottom line. If that bottom position is a significant net loss, are we a viable contract in Parliament to offer as a private contractor? If the net loss is part of a wellbeing strategy, and it is not a loss but an investment into wellbeing, that is a different approach to doing it.

- Q53 **Mr Barros-Curtis:** I guess that goes to the question I was going to ask about future vision for the gym. We have touched on aspects of it in all your answers. Is that a part of the conversation that you need to have with the rest of the team in Parliament? We can do that as a Committee with this investigation, and which the Modernisation Committee, of which I am also a member, is also looking at, as part of a reform strategy for this Parliament to look at? If contractual changes or instructions from Parliament need to follow, that can be looked at.

Wes Auvache: Broadly speaking, a more holistic approach to health and wellbeing more generally would help this. Looking at the very good departments and operations that we have in place already, with occupational health, health and wellbeing and the gym, while we do work collaboratively, there is a bit of silo work in there. If there is an approach that would have wellbeing as a whole, that would help drive this forward, and the gym would be included in that, almost looking at the gym beyond just being somewhere that you go down and use a treadmill and do some weights—it is a health and wellbeing space. Departments within the House can work together to help that.

- Q54 **Bambos Charalambous:** I declare that I am a member of the gym, and I have used it in the last week. I just want to thank the staff for being so helpful. My question is for you, Jon, about how you work with the parliamentary health and wellbeing service to promote healthy lifestyles to



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those who work here. Obviously, you will get referrals from the health and wellbeing service. I think Lauren mentioned Technique, who do physiotherapy. That is one approach. How ad hoc is that? Do you have a more detailed partnership relationship with the health and wellbeing service?

Jon Giles: We do work with them—they are a fantastic team. I have worked alongside the team for many years. When they were based in Millbank, I used to send instructors across to teach in their facilities and encourage people to exercise, not necessarily come to the gym. Over time and certainly since covid, and maybe down to our locations and changing people, we are probably more reactive than proactive. We work a lot with GP referrals, so our GP referral manager will have people referred to them from wellbeing. We support the wellbeing team with their stalls in Portcullis House and the events they run for incoming MPs or parliamentary staff. We talk about the gym provision alongside the wellbeing provision. In previous years we used to help with smoking cessation and alcohol reduction programmes to support parliamentary staff. If we are talking about wellbeing on the whole, I think more integration with the wellbeing team, with the GP on site and with our physio would probably keep that a little bit more seamless.

Q55 Bambos Charalambous: I think that would be helpful because if your target is weight loss, gyms are only a part of that. Linking it to nutrition and other things would be quite a good way forward. My next question is to Lauren. How does the gym work with the in-house occupational health service team to support wellbeing?

Lauren Kirk: Our occupational health team helps patients get back to work. They will have a phased return back to work and during that time they will use our gym. They will be referred to the physiotherapists and our exercise referral specialist. And they will have sessions getting them back to normal health. Once they have finished these sessions, we offer a concession membership as a way to encourage them to keep using the gym to stay healthy, as long as it does not interfere with their working hours. So we offer membership. We said that with occupational health it would be three months on the concession rate, but it is hard to put a timestamp on when someone is going to be back to normal health. It is three months, but we are open to extending it if someone feels that they want to keep using the gym on that concession rate.

Q56 Chair: Do many people take up that concession?

Lauren Kirk: Anyone who has used the physiotherapy or the exercise referral specialist has moved on to a concession rate. We do not have many memberships—I think it is under 10. But the number of people going through physiotherapy to then going to the gym is high. It is the majority of the people.

Q57 Bambos Charalambous: How do you link with other in-house health initiatives? Does the gym support things like parkrun-type events and help groups who want to take part in exercise?



Lauren Kirk: This goes back to the vision of the gym. At the moment there are no active collaborations. There is so much potential with parkruns. We could set that up and do training. We could help collaborate with people to do that. At the moment there is no active collaboration. But like I say about the potential for health and wellbeing, we do not want it to be seen as just a gym. We do not want to just promote the gym for you to come down and use our equipment. We want to be able to offer other services and to collaborate.

Q58 Carolyn Harris: Good morning, and thank you. What thoughts have you got on—I am going to guess not many—the 26% of users who are female and providing specifically for menopause?

Lauren Kirk: Again, this is all in the vision. I personally am very passionate about women's health and teaching women about their health. I think there is not enough of it. I would love to use our gym space to do that, whether that is through workshops, training or anything like that. At the moment we are not doing anything towards it. But on all these ideas that are coming at us, it is for me perfect. I want to be able to do that. I want to be able to provide a service that will help women—that 26%. I want women to come into the gym and feel confident with how to use equipment and having a space to work out, and being educated, rather than just getting fitter.

Q59 Carolyn Harris: When women do come to the gym, are they encouraged to do weight training, for example?

Lauren Kirk: It depends. When people come to the gym, they normally tell us what they want from the gym. A lot of the time women will say that they do not have a lot of experience with weight training, or they are worried about doing it in front of people. At that point we will say to them, "We can induct you—we can teach you how to do it." I guess moving forward we should have a better strategy for that and make it part of signing up for the gym that we tell people, "This is something we can do for you. Especially for women, we have this service for you that you can do."

Q60 Carolyn Harris: Nobody has trained or is advocating for resistance training for menopausal women, nor are they looking at their bone health, the differences as their body changes, or how cardio does nothing. Nobody is giving that advice at the moment?

Jon Giles: That is a fundamental step change: resistance training and strength training are critical for perimenopausal or menopausal women, and osteoporosis and bone health are critical. If we are talking about identifying communities within the estate that we are working alongside, women's health is that community. We have a women's lifting club in Covent Garden, and we need to promote much more about strength training.

I often hear feedback from my team. I give my team extended lunch breaks so they use the gym, because an hour just does not do anything. That comes back to leadership and management. When I attended my



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menopause champion course, I was the only man in the room, and I was the only chief exec. For me, that is a problem. If women are attending our facility and they have to rush in to have a workout and rush out, then sometimes just that time is a barrier to starting. When they come down, we should absolutely be doing strength training, lifting weights and specific programmes for women.

Q61 Carolyn Harris: This month is International Menopause Month, but this week is International Menopause Week and Saturday is International Menopause Day. We as parliamentarians will be celebrating that with a Backbench Business debate, plus we have had other activity going on. It would be nice if the gym were doing something alongside that specifically to encourage women to come in. One of the thoughts I had when you talked about the vision and said you can only hold it in the studio, is that you could maybe do something virtual. You could have women in the offices doing it while you have eight people in the studio, with a trainer giving nutrition advice along with the resistance stuff, and proactively get women to go in and talk about how they should be looking after their health.

Not unrelated to that, because it comes with menopause, is weight gain. I am a woman of a certain age and I am a Mounjaro user. When I am back home, I use the gym six times a week. I do not use the gym here. There are a lot of us in here who are on the journey of weight loss. Are you doing anything specifically about supporting people who are maybe taking weight loss jabs, but need that extra support, and encouraging them to use fitness as well as the jabs?

Jon Giles: No, but that does raise an important question about the jab in general. As an industry, we are reacting to many more people now making that journey using GLP-1 or Mounjaro jabs, because typically there is a timeframe for usage, and if people are not educated on movement and sensible choices, and maybe some support in mental health, then when they come off, where does that cycle end and where does it begin again? There has to be a full industry-wide programme to help people on that journey, because that drug will make a significant difference, but it will not help if they have no understanding of what to do after.

Carolyn Harris: A better strategy—you guys could improve it.

Jon Giles: There has to be a connected strategy, otherwise it is a very quick fix that will cause long-term problems in a years' time from now. There is nothing currently at the Westminster Gym, but that is not to say there could not be. It comes back to my point about making sure the gym is a service to Parliament and exploring all these things that would be a cost to implement—an investment to implement—with a trained, qualified person who can take people through a full journey, which might be 12 months as opposed to 20 weeks. It is not going to generate a surplus; it is just going to make sure that people have the knowledge and expertise to continue on that journey while they are an employee of the House.

Carolyn Harris: I would welcome further conversations on both those

issues. Thank you very much.

- Q62 **Kirsteen Sullivan:** Lauren and Jon, following on from some of the issues that have been raised this morning, we know that menopause can significantly impact women's mental health. What thoughts do you have on the gym supporting mental health more broadly?

Lauren Kirk: Like I said before, there is so much potential for the team to educate Members on these specific things and help them through it. The gym staff are amazing at giving advice when it is needed. When people come to us wanting advice on mental health, menopause or weight loss, we are really good at giving that advice, but we have no structure in place or an avenue for people to go down to get help. I would not want to rush that. I would want it to be well thought out. I would want the people who are teaching these things to be well educated and have enough knowledge. At the moment, the staff might not have enough knowledge regarding weight loss jobs to give good workshops and this education. Moving forward, it would be a case of the staff being well educated and able to give the information, and having an avenue for people to go down, with mental health being a big priority for people, especially in this estate.

- Q63 **Kirsteen Sullivan:** It is fantastic to see that you are all mental health first aiders. For me, that is a clear commitment. Are there any plans to roll that out to other staff?

Jon Giles: The name "Westminster Gym" ringfences it into a place of lifting weights and movement. We need to start thinking about a wellbeing hub or a place where we are not just giving people a gym membership. It is a place in Parliament that people come to for physical health, mental health and social health, and they do that activity in whatever location it is, but in close proximity.

When looking at how we structure gym provision, we will be considering more studio-based classes to improve social health, so that people have a connection to other people who have interests in common. We have spaces that can support people with neurodiversity—not loud spaces with bright lights and music—so that they can still do physical activity in a space that supports that community.

For the last 20 years, I have had a hirer called Breathe in two of my sites, whose practitioners do seminars and sessions around mental health, along with talking therapies and hypnotherapy. It is about making it very normal for people to come and openly talk about their mental health as part of their wellbeing journey, so that we remove the stigma from it. There is a lot more that can be done by reframing it away from the Westminster Gym into something else. It stops people thinking, "I've got poor mental health. I go here for talking therapy." No—we can do a combination inside this location around wellbeing.

- Q64 **Kirsteen Sullivan:** It seems as if now is the time to have that wider consideration of what you want the gym to be or what we all want the gym to be. Is it about a pure focus on the physical, or is it that broader look at both physical and mental health and wellbeing? It would be

interesting to hear more about that. Are there any new facilities or equipment upgrades planned in the next year?

Wes Auvache: I have submitted a budget request for kit to be replaced in two years' time. The kit was replaced just before the covid lockdown, so it was not used very much for one or two years. It is coming towards the end of its life, although it is in good condition, so it will be due a refresh in a year or two.

Chair: I have two further requests to ask short questions. I want to wrap things up because we have extended this session—it has been brilliant—and we also have Al and other colleagues waiting to give evidence, too.

Mr Barros-Curtis: I have just a request, because I am very conscious of time. We touched on this in your answers to me, as well as in what we were talking about just now. Wes, this may be best for you, but maybe Jon and Lauren can feed in. Could you write to the Committee after this to explain how we best drive forward that holistic approach to wellbeing? I must admit that I am still not entirely clear what you need from us. I am not particularly interested, in and of itself, in a report that just gathers dust on the shelf. What buy-in do you need and from whom, and what stakeholders do you need?

We did not have time to touch on R&R. We will not delve into the limitations of the space as it stands, but I would be curious to know whether wellbeing is a factor in R&R. Lots of things feed into R&R. Do health and wellbeing? If not, we need to consider that urgently, because the decision is fast tunnelling towards us—as in very, very fast. What provisions are there, not just for after—that is, when R&R is complete and there is a new space for a gym and wellbeing is central—but during the journey? There will be a period of many years, whatever happens with R&R. If you could consider those aspects in that letter, as well as what proactive stakeholder engagement and other things you need from us, I would be grateful.

Chair: That would be really helpful. Thank you, Wes. We overran a little, but it was worth while. Thank you, Lauren, Jon and Wesley for your evidence. We will write it up, you will get a copy and it will go into our general review of this overall topic. Thank you for your evidence.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Al Carns MP and Marcus Hudson

Q65 **Chair:** Welcome and thanks to our second panel in our discussion of health and wellbeing. We are joined by Al Carns and Marcus Hudson. It is good that you are going to give evidence as gym users. Let us kick off. Over to you, Al.

Al Carns: First of all, thank you very much for this Committee. It is really important. I am a brand-new MP, a year and a half in, so I am way less experienced than some people on the panel, but I thought it would be



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useful to provide a fresh look at the gym, and in particular the health and wellbeing services that are provided.

I have spent a lot of time in gyms over my career, in and out of various environments, in Afghanistan, the middle east, all the way through to gyms in various military establishments. I ended up here and became a member of the parliamentary gym at the start of my parliamentary career. I have been going there probably four or five days a week, every week that we have been sitting.

What has been interesting for me, to be honest, is the disparity between the services provided and, in some cases, the lifestyle that is demanded of MPs and their staff in Parliament. I would like to caveat that by saying that the staff in the gym are amazing: they are good, knowledgeable people who know exactly what they are doing. They are excellent, but they do not necessarily have the correct facilities or capabilities to match the standard and pressures of parliamentary life.

What do I say that? We have a diverse workforce. We have young people all the way down to 18, or people doing work experience, and we have people in the latter stages of life. All of them demand very different facilities, classes and requirements from a health and fitness facility. As mentioned before, that could be anything from menopause advice and mental health all the way through to some heavy weights, big bars and CrossFit capabilities. We have a large workforce—about 15,000 people roll in and out of this area—which actually provides quite a lucrative group of individuals who are short on time and want to stay fit and healthy, yet we have only a 3.7% take-up in the gym itself. There is a disparity somewhere between either the work requirements of being in Parliament and the parliamentary system or the standards of the gym, or perhaps both, which are not being matched correctly to deliver the right fitness facilities for the career that we have collectively embarked on, and that our staff help us out with.

Why is it important? Exercise as a whole reduces risks of major illnesses by up to 30%, including coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and early death. Preventive healthcare is the key area; we are the sick man of Europe. People look at us as leaders, whether we like it or not, and there is an element of us setting a standard by collectively taking care of ourselves. It also helps us to operate more effectively as Members of Parliament or individuals in Parliament by taking care of our health and wellbeing.

Around 82% of people state that regular activity is important for mental health and wellbeing, yet we have only a 3% uptake. That may not include the 10%, 15% or 20% of people who use gyms outside Parliament, but I wonder whether we need to improve our facilities and standards to increase our uptake, productivity and—importantly—health and wellbeing across both our MP staff and our staffing structures that support us in delivering our job.



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What are some of the sections that I think we could improve? I did not really know the word to use for this first point, but I put it as “attractiveness” or “welcoming”. The gym itself is in a basement—I am sure you will all have been there—and it is need of refreshment and repair. There are facings missing, and in some cases the showers are way out of date. The changing facilities do not have hangers for your suits. You cannot have and keep a locker; you have to take a locker. You have to lay your suit on the bench when you need to get into it, unless you hang it on your door, which usually bangs into three or four other people to your left and right.

My point is that one of the hardest things about going to the gym is getting out of bed, convincing yourself and going in the first place, and you will use any excuse not to go to that gym—I do that regularly. One of the excuses is that it is not a welcoming place, and people will not necessarily buy into it. There is a bit about refreshing it and making sure it is a polished and modern facility. When I say that, I mean repairs, modernised equipment and changing rooms that are suitable for people who are in a rush and have only a very short period of time to squeeze in some fitness or health and wellbeing care.

There is also ease of access. The gym is open at 7 am and closes at night, yet most modern gyms have 24/7 access. Can we have a look at facilitating that? It is an assurance issue, but there is something about having an open-access gym. If we need to put CCTV in there or whatever, that would be fantastic. There has been a number of times when I have finished at 10.30 pm and thought I could squeeze in 20 minutes, but the gym has not been open, so I have had to do it in a different way.

There is a requirement to refresh the locker system. One of the biggest problems is space and travelling with your gym kit back and forth. We also have London rates of both pay and affordability, but importantly from my perspective, and for our staff in particular, in some cases there is the pain of living in London and having to travel long distances. It is much easier if people can conduct both their professional and wellbeing activities in one place, rather than having to bounce between different locations. Usually, the biggest problem is storing your suit or work clothes.

I would also talk about the variety and breadth of services. We have a 3% uptake and a diverse workforce. Are those services and classes, which you would get in a normal gym outside of Government, fit for purpose and attractive to our workforce, and are they run at the right times? It is a very difficult circle to square because of the amount of time that we have to put into it, but there is something about making sure that there is a breadth of services available.

I will also just mention the affordability piece; £45 a month is way above normal gym rates in some cases outside, whether that be any of the big gym companies that provide 24/7 access, modern equipment and modern classes. I wonder whether that is right for our workforce.



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Without ranting again, I will finish by going back to the point that the staff are doing a fantastic job. If we only have such a low uptake in the gym, I wonder whether that is actually because the gym is not fit for purpose in the first place. A modern, fresh, welcoming gym with a breadth of classes and the right atmosphere would attract many more people than we have in there today.

Q66 **Chair:** Thank you, Al. Marcus, tell us how you use the gym. What equipment do you use? What classes have you used?

Marcus Hudson: Thank you, Chair and Committee, for having me. I used the gym when I was in Parliament between September 2024 and September 2025. I would go typically four times a week, like Al. I have been going to the gym for a very long time, and no matter what the facility is like—even if it is a bit lacklustre in places—I do not need that much motivation to go. I would typically use the weights and sometimes the cardio equipment, although classes not as much.

I went so regularly because it is a habit that I formed over seven or eight years. I know this is not exactly what you asked, but for young members who have not gone to the gym before, I think the barrier to entry is quite high, especially for this facility, given the cost and the quality of the equipment, and just because it is not very welcoming; it is in a basement, as Al said. I would go four times a week, but I would attribute that more to the fact that I have been going for a very long time, not to the facility itself.

Q67 **Mary Glindon:** Thank you, Al and Marcus. You might have touched on this, but how does the cost compare to health facilities elsewhere that you may be aware of?

Al Carns: I think in some cases it is double the cost. I understand that the more 24/7 open gyms have a bigger uptake, so they can perhaps reduce costs, but it is far more expensive than many of the gyms I have been a member of, whether back in the constituency—

Chair: Where is your seat?

Al Carns: Birmingham Selly Oak. Some of the big gym groups have lower costs because they have a bigger footprint. Less for me—I will be honest—but more for the staff that we have here, if you want the uptake, you have got to lower the cost. It is just not affordable for them; it is quite difficult for them to afford it.

Marcus Hudson: I did a bit of googling before I came. The Charing Cross Gym Group is £37 a month for a peak-time membership. If you wanted to sign up for a 12-month fixed-term pay-all-in-one-go contract it would be £33 a month. When you start to go into zone 2, zone 3 or zone 4, which is typically where staffers live—we cannot afford to live in zone 1, obviously—it can get down to £32 or even into the £20s.

I am quite keen to spread the message, “This is so important for my work. I couldn’t be as good at my job if I didn’t use the gym,” so I have shown



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quite a lot of people around the gym—probably four or five over the past year. They were typically around my age, and they would say to me, “It’s too expensive. Why can’t I just go to the Gym Group for £30 a month outside my house?” Or they would say, “Oh God, it’s not very welcoming here, and it’s tiny. Why would I go when I could spend £10 less for somewhere better?”

I would like to caveat that answer and the rest of my answers by saying that the staff are lovely. It is nothing to do with the staff. I would particularly like to name-drop Christian and Stephan who work there. They are lovely, but, frankly, it is not worth the money.

Q68 Bambos Charalambous: You are both incredibly fit people and, Al, your endurance feats are legendary. Does the gym meet your goals for physical activity? I know you both exercise on a regular basis.

Al Carns: I would say that my standards are actually quite low in this space. Wherever I go, I can find somewhere and somehow to train. But as the diversity of training has changed—I do quite a lot of weights and cardiovascular activity—the kit in this gym has not changed with it. What I mean by that is more bodywork facilities—not the company itself, but things like multipurpose frames. For example, the roof is too low. If you want to do pull-ups, you have to remove the panels in the roof so that your head can go up into the roof and back down. If you want to go on the stepping machine you have to remove the panels on the roof because your head bangs. I am quite tall, and that is not an issue for everyone, but the area it is in reduces the flexibility of the use of the space. I do not think it has kept pace with the times. That is probably not the individual’s fault; it is probably the space and the constraints of the location.

Q69 Mr Barros-Curtis: In terms of mental health, what more can the facilitating and provision of services do to further wellbeing and mental health support than it currently does? What more could it be doing?

Al Carns: I have quite a lot of experience in this from my military background, but also from my last year working as the veterans Minister and looking at mental health provision. I am not an expert in any way, shape or form, but I would start with the first bit: is it a welcoming place to go? If the answer is no, we have failed the first step. People will not necessarily come with a mental health issue, but that mental health issue may come out after a bit of engagement or consistency in going with the gym. These systems often work best when we combine mental health facilities, nurses, individuals or specialists with the gym itself, so that people can pick up on certain atmospherics and help people with those issues. I am a big fan, and I mentioned the statistics on how physical activity increases mental resilience, but a comprehensive package in the same place is the answer.

Marcus Hudson: I want to follow on from what Al said. With this discussion it is important to note that physical health is the same as mental health—regular exercise promotes mental health, and I do not think it should be seen in isolation. The main thing we need to do is make



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it more accessible by lowering the cost or making the facility better or more welcoming. One easy win for the gym here is to make people know that you can get a free trial. No one knows that. That might be a little pedantic, but I have asked a lot of fellow staff members, and no one knows that you can go one time for free. That would be something easy to do, to it known that people can go for a one-off. Yes, we should lower the cost, or make the facility bigger and more welcoming. Currently, the barrier for entry is far too high, especially for new members. If you go down there and think, "Oh Jesus, do I want to work out here four times a week?"—I think the answer often is no.

Q70 Bob Blackman: You have both been quite critical of the location and the facilities within it, but given the constraints of where it is sited, are there any facilities that could be added that would enhance the position for staff and Members of Parliament?

Al Carns: I think a complete refurbishment would be required to make it more welcoming. I think we might want to step back and look at whether we are doing it right in the first place. Is having a small gym in the basement of Westminster the right solution for such a large and diverse workforce, or is there—maybe in the longer or medium term—another solution, such as a Whitehall gym rather than a Westminster gym? I am not sure, but if we are to do critical analysis of what is lacking, you are unlikely to get where you want to be, given the geographical location of the gym.

Therefore, we may want to explore other options, discount those options and then return to the question and say, "Actually this is about minor or marginal improvements and we have to just like it or lump it". Or perhaps there is a different solution, whether that is across Whitehall rather than Westminster and in combination with other Government Departments—I don't know; I am making this up—or there is a deal to be done outside with a bigger gym group that has better facilities.

Q71 Bob Blackman: Just to come back on that, if it was to be contained within the parliamentary boundaries because of security issues, what extra facilities would you want to see in an enhanced gym?

Al Carns: I would like to see it fully refurbished. I would like to see more cross-functional exercise equipment, such as what we call a BeaverFit frame, which is difficult because of the roof. I would like to see more classes available at more flexible times. I would like to see it 24/7 and I would like to see the equipment updated on a regular basis to ensure it is keeping pace with the most modern physical equipment available.

Q72 Bob Blackman: Classes could obviously use the equipment, or they could be held in an open area.

Al Carns: Exactly—whether it be spin classes, circuits or different types of fitness fit for various different age groups, sizes and shapes across the parliamentary estate.



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Marcus Hudson: Just to follow on from that, if it were moved somewhere else in the parliamentary estate with, I would say, 50% more space, that would be fantastic. Ideally, it would be somewhere with natural light. I know that sounds a little bit arbitrary and not really high priority, but it does make a massive difference. Especially if you are new to gym and you want to sign up, being somewhere with natural light is so important.

In terms of the specifics, we need more weights, more than one squat rack and more than one bench press and so on, more cardio machines and a bigger facility. The changing rooms, going back to Al's point, also need significant improvement. There is typically a puddle next to the showers. Again, that is a minor point, unless you are worried about slipping up on the floor. There are moths as well. That could be improved.

Al Carns: Interestingly, fitness goes through fads. It goes up and down, with CrossFit and HYROX and so on. I would argue that some of the equipment has not tracked some of those changes. That is not to say that we have got to change the equipment every time a fad comes up, but there is some multipurpose equipment that is missing from the gym, in particular.

The changing rooms are the biggest bugbear for me. When you have got to go down with a suit and your physical kit, you have nowhere to put it. There are not even hangers on the wall to hang your suit up, so you have got to lay it on the bench. It then falls on the floor and becomes wet because there are puddles and the drainage does not work. The showers are slightly decrepit.

I have been to lots of gyms, and I will continue to use that gym, but my point is: if we want to increase the membership and increase the health and wellbeing of our MPs and staff, it has got to be more attractive and cheaper to go to.

Q73 **Mr Barros-Curtis:** Very quickly, picking up on what you and Bob were talking about, it is about what emphasis one puts on proximity and, obviously, security—albeit, from the evidence we heard earlier, the data suggests that in 2025 only 13 MPs go, whether that is regularly or one off. Obviously, we have a regular user in front of us. Delving into that, is that because of a lack of knowledge, cost, attractiveness and all those things? Cost will be less of an issue for Members of Parliament, but certainly it will be an issue for members of staff, as Marcus very eloquently said. That goes to your point, Al, about whether you look at a bigger partner across the Thames or further afield. That is something we probably have to think about a little bit more offline.

In terms of the gym's current integration with other health and wellbeing activities, how well do you think that is done? When you think of other sport communities, football teams and parliamentary teams, is it done well? Could it be done better? Would that bring in some more people, Marcus, because people might then get a bit more exposed to something they just do not have awareness of. What are your thoughts on that?



Al Carns: I will hand over the Marcus in a second, but it is all linked, isn't it? We have got the parliamentary nurse and mental health facilities. Imagine if it was all in the same place. If mental health and the nurse were there, we could say, "listen, we may want to explore other avenues to get the positivity back. Why don't we do some exercise twice a week or three times a week?" That is not the only solution. It is among other multifaceted approaches.

They are often best when you go to football teams or, indeed, in military establishments, where they are often all combined—your rehabilitation centre, your mental health and your physical activity are all in the same spot. Interestingly, in the last place I was based, we had just built a new rehabilitation centre, and it was all in the same place: a one-stop shop for health and wellbeing.

It is fantastic because you build up data, insight and understanding. It is a welcoming place to go. The uptake went through the roof. Before, you might have to go and see the nurse, then go to the gym and then go and see the physio, and they were all in different locations. That is the ideal world. I get that we have constraints here.

Q74 Mr Barros-Curtis: It goes to the point, which you may have heard me talk about before, about R&R—the thinking about that is and the current build of it. Wes has very kindly said he will follow up with some written evidence to the Committee on that, but you are right that that feeds into that and what the parliamentary community looks like in terms of health and wellbeing over the short, medium and long term.

Al Carns: Can I just give a comparison? In the military, you are exceptionally busy; you are bouncing around all over the world, and it is quite physically arduous. As an MP, you are exceptionally busy as well—it is slightly different, but it is just as busy, if not busier. But the facilities are far less available and of a lower standard for MPs and those in political and public service than they are for the military. Now, I understand why, but, in some cases, there is an element of needing to modernise what we deliver.

Marcus Hudson: Going back to your point about integration, in only one year of being in Parliament, I was added to, I think, two or three different WhatsApp groups with "new run club" in the title. I think there is a big demand for a more sociable group, supported by either the Jubilee Hall Trust or wellbeing services in Parliament. There is a big demand for these services. If I had made even more friends in Parliament over the last year, maybe I would have been added to even more similar group chats. There is definitely a demand for these kinds of things, and I think the gym could be instrumental in providing that.

Mr Barros-Curtis: Maybe that is something they can take away, and that we can pick up as well. Thank you.

Navendu Mishra: Thank you. I thank Marcus and Al for their contribution, and also the witnesses from the gym. This is more of a



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comment rather than a question, Chair, and it goes back to the conversation about the cost of the gym. Every year, or every 18 months, when we have the discussion about catering price rises, it is always mentioned that price rises disproportionately impact low-income staff who work on the estate. But the argument is also made that catering services operate on the Parliamentary estate without paying rent, and often the offer available—if you go to the Strangers' dining room—is more expensive than what is available commercially outside.

There is a similar argument here. I do not know whether the trust pays rent here—I imagine Parliament owns the Portcullis House building—but if there is no rent being paid, perhaps there is an argument to be made about the cost. I accept the point that AI made about PureGym or The Gym Group, but in my constituency, you can get a peak subscription for £16 a month, which is a lot lower than in London. I get that that is obviously 200 miles from London, but perhaps there will be some staff, if you look at IPSA pay bands, who are on £25,000 a year working in zone 1, so £45 or £46 a month—whatever it is—obviously impacts them a lot more. That is maybe something for the Committee to think about in terms of the cost.

Chair: Yes, and diet and all the other wider issues you have raised. Thank you, Nav.

We have covered a lot of ground, and at speed, so thank you, everybody. Thank you to all our witnesses for talking to us today and answering our questions about the gym and fitness. We express our thanks particularly to all those who work at the Westminster Gym for the good work you do in supporting health and wellbeing for all of us who work here. We will conclude this session, but we are returning to this issue as part of a wider inquiry over time, and we look forward to taking that forward. Thanks again.