



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Administration Committee

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

Tuesday 24 February 2026

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Nick Smith (Chair); Bambos Charalambous; Alberto Costa; Mary Glendon; Navendu Mishra; Tessa Munt.

Questions 98 - 120

Witnesses

[I](#): Josie Lazenby, Head of Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing; Tanya Harris, Health and Wellbeing Manager; Josephine Willows, Director of Members Staff Engagement; and Dr Ashley Weinberg, Chartered Occupational Psychologist and Lecturer, University of Salford.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Josie Lazenby, Tanya Harris, Josephine Willows and Dr Ashley Weinberg.

Q98 **Chair:** Good morning everybody, I am Nick Smith, Chair of the Administration Committee. Welcome and thank you for coming to our Committee's fourth session in its inquiry into health and wellbeing. We are focusing today on mental health and workplace pressures and how well the House is supporting our parliamentary community.

We will each ask a number of questions and I will bring colleagues in at the appropriate moment. We welcome our witnesses Josie Lazenby, Tanya Harris, Jo Willows and Dr Ashley Weinberg and invite them to please introduce themselves.

Josephine Willows: Thank you very much, Chair. My name is Jo Willows. I am the Director of Members Staff Engagement and head up the Engagement and Events team, which is part of the wider Members and Members Staff Services team, providing HR support, Members' proxies and support for members of staff generally, and lots of training as well.

Josie Lazenby: Good morning everyone. Thank you very much for inviting us. I am Josie Lazenby. I am Head of the Health and Wellbeing Service within Parliament, a registered nurse, a specialist occupational health practitioner and a former mental health first aid instructor. I have been here coming up to four years, leading the team in all aspects of health and wellbeing.

Tanya Harris: My name is Tanya Harris. I am the Health and Wellbeing lead. I am responsible for the delivery of the health and wellbeing programme in Parliament and the contract management of the EAP and mindfulness programmes. I have over 20 years' experience in the team, delivering welfare and counselling interventions to support people at work.

Dr Weinberg: I am a senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Salford. I am a chartered occupational psychologist, which is a work psychologist in everyday parlance, looking at matters to do with wellbeing and performance in a range of workplaces, mostly the public sector.

Q99 **Chair:** I am tasked to ask the first question and it is to Tanya Harris. Can you describe to us the mental health support that is currently on offer in the House for MPs, their staff and staff of the House?

Tanya Harris: Thank you, Chair. We offer a wide range of services, mental health support services, both in-house and via our trusted third-party providers. Members, their staff and staff of the administration have access to our assistance programmes, and that includes counselling support.

Members also have access to an on-site counsellor, who can help with issues such as workplace stress, anxiety and depression. We also provide staff of the House and Members with occupational health assessment. That is a really valuable tool in assessing health at work needs and providing additional mental health support if necessary. We can also refer on to psychological assessment if needed, to psychiatry and other support and resources to help individuals in the workplace.

Members' staff have access to occupational health services, but that is via third-party providers of their choice. We link in with our dedicated staff wellbeing adviser, who is in place for Members' staff to ensure that they get connected to the mental health support that they need. We have a trauma risk management protocol, and we introduced that following, as you probably sadly remember all too well, the Jo Cox and Sir David Amess situations. That is an important tool to ensure that those experiencing potentially traumatic incidents have the right psychological support afterwards, and we have that in place.

It is also important to mention the proactive support that we offer. Our focus is very much on trying to prevent mental ill health and not just supporting that afterwards. In our wellbeing programme we offer workshops, training and events, raising awareness around such things as Mental Health Awareness Day, which is a big one for us. It is equally important that we do a lot of work to ensure that people have access to and know about the services. We try to prevent mental ill health rather than supporting it afterwards.

Q100 Chair: Thank you, Tanya. There is deep and wide support. Are there services you would like to provide but do not currently have the resources or capacity to do so? Can you talk a little bit more about the EAP and what support this provides?

Tanya Harris: Of course, yes. We know that many Members find it difficult to engage with mental health support services in their constituency. Often there may be concerns about trust and confidentiality and accessing between their lives in their constituency and their lives in Westminster, which makes it harder for them to access local services. We feel that peer support groups would be valuable to look at some of those issues, putting support in place where Members who really understand their working environment can help each other with our intervention and support, and hopefully, a doorway into the support services. That is one thing.

Another thing that we have noticed very much over the years, and particularly since the latest election and for the newly elected, is how important support from Members' families is. We all know how important it is to have that support around us in times of need, particularly when work can be stressful and things happen. It would be nice to potentially consider if we could do more to support partners, spouses and family members during times of difficulty. The pressures of social media now and the scrutiny that Members and their families are often under can make it hard for them to access support in their local areas. We wonder if that is something else that could be considered in a bit more depth.

Q101 Chair: How do our services, your services, provided here compare to other organisations or Parliaments of comparable size?

Tanya Harris: They remain comparable. We are very much in line with other employers in recognising the importance of mental health and looking after our workforce. People are our best asset. We work alongside what other organisations do. Having the in-house multidisciplinary team also helps. It helps to understand Parliament's specific culture and



challenges and helps us to meet the diverse needs, particularly of the community.

Josie and I are part of the EU27 Plus Parliaments' Medical Services Group. That has been a valuable group to understand what goes on in other Parliaments and to talk through some of the challenges and the best practices that they put in place and also to share a lot of the positive things that we do. It is important to recognise that those situations often have private healthcare and we work in a different healthcare model. We are confident that we are comparable and we do a lot of good work, but we are forever reviewing and benchmarking against other organisations to ensure that we are up to date and current with what we do.

Q102 Chair: Thank you. Dr Weinberg, can you please tell us about the work you have undertaken in the past with MPs that has helped you understand the pressures on us and to make recommendations on mental health support for parliamentarians?

Dr Weinberg: Certainly, thank you very much indeed, and thank you for having me along. I have done a number of studies probably since the early 1990s, so you could call me a very sad individual, looking at MPs and trying to assess the prevalence of symptoms of distress. At that time, people were looking at stress in many occupations but not in politics. I have always been quite interested in politicians' decision making—perhaps it is linked with wellbeing. The early studies seemed to show that MPs were probably a little bit higher in the prevalence of the physical symptoms of stress that people might experience, headaches, indigestion and so on. I then wanted to find out a bit more about what was causing the issues, what is different about politics, is there anything different about politics. That seemed to show that, just like any other workplace, there are a number of factors that are a problem, and I think we might come to some of those in a bit.

I wanted to see how effective the interventions in place were. At that time, the Modernisation Committee, as was, was looking at trialling reforms to sitting hours in the House of Commons. It did not produce any main effects for people's suffering, but I was starting to find, as the years went by into the early 2000s, that there were key predictors of mental discomfort and distress. The first is a lack of control over events, which I know is unavoidable in politics, but also the impact of trying to gel people's work and home life. I am interested that Tanya mentioned the potential capacity to support families or offer some contact point for families. I would say that is vital.

I looked at the new intake in 1997 of 236 people. What were the key predictors there? Not just having to take work home and trying to work with family there, but family adapting or struggling to adapt to this new job and the whirlwind change in life that it brought. Obviously people adapt over time, and so do families, but I was minded to go back to former Minister Edwina Currie's comments about exhausted irrationality, ruined marriages and ruined health. Surely that is not what we want in any particular job, particularly where it is making decisions that run a country. I know that some Members will think that it is not a job, it is something different, but it shares many elements with other workplaces.



That helped me to understand that Parliament could benefit from looking more at this as a job of work and at the number of factors that could be changed, in addition to the wonderful safety net and stress management that is already offered. Can we work smarter in some way? Can we make this life just a bit more manageable, instead of what one MP told me was a way of life and, "There it is, nothing I can do about it"? I believe there is.

Q103 Chair: Thank you for that encouraging start. Did you say your first study was in 1997? I am interested in that. Of course, since then we have had big churn elections, in 2010, 2019 and 2024. How can prospective candidates and new MPs be better prepared for these roles and the possible impact on their mental health?

Dr Weinberg: The first one I did with sitting MPs was in 1992, so that is how far back I go with this. However, what strikes me—my apologies if it is out of kilter with what you hope for—is that there is no job description. You need a job description. We can argue, perhaps Members will, about whether it is a job or not, but it is a basic requirement of any job of work or role that there are clear sets of expectations. That is not simply about satisfying a tick box in any way, it is about setting up some kind of expectation of the individual trying to do that job. Parties who recruit and select candidates could then say, "This is what will be required of you and it is on the Parliament website", where you have some sort of gentle hints at the moment. It needs to be made explicit.

It is also positive for people's wellbeing to know what the psychological contract is and what expectations they will be required to fulfil in some way. How it is done obviously would be down to individuals, but I would argue that there needs to be some kind of standardisation to make this more manageable

Very quickly in addition, I am thinking about the role of political parties. I am sure they all play a very valuable role, but I guess there is a lot of variation in preparing people for the life that is ahead of them if they are successful in being elected. Otherwise it is a whirlwind that catches them by surprise and, as has been said before by Tanya, their families as well. I do not think I need to convince anyone that having a family or a set of friends or a support network who want to support you in your job, and do not feel that their lives are diminished by the tremendous strain that you might be carrying, is a good thing for people's wellbeing and performance at work.

Setting those expectations, providing support through political parties, and also making clear what support there is when you get here, are all necessary. What childcare arrangements are there, and is there enough availability? What support might there be for my wellbeing, particularly if I have a past history of having depression, anxiety or a common mental health issue? All those things help to prepare people much more than maybe currently is the case.

Q104 Alberto Costa: Good morning, everybody, and thank you very much for the very good work that you all do as part of the parliamentary community. Following from what the Chair asked—and this is directed to Dr Weinberg and Jo—what are the main pressures on parliamentarians? You have just



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touched on it a little, but what are the main pressures on parliamentarians, and importantly their staff, which are different to pressures experienced in other sectors of the workforce?

Josephine Willows: As you all know, Members can employ up to five full-time equivalent members of staff. Usually there is only one in Parliament, so the majority are in their constituencies. As you know from last night, there can be long hours working in Parliament, and staff will be there supporting their Member with procedural policy work and just being there to support them. It can be quite lonely. Often there is only one parliamentary assistant in a small office by themselves and a feeling of isolation.

Moving on to constituency staff, there has been a huge increase in constituency work. Constituency workers receive a lot of emails on behalf of the Member. For constituents, it is often their last port of call and they feel that they have nowhere else to go. They are highly stressed, sometimes quite aggressive, and caseworkers want to help but they cannot respond in the way the constituent wants them to respond. They might want legal advice or advice on their asylum claim, which is for the Home Office. It is hard for the caseworker to say no; it is hard and the majority of Members' staff want to help and want to support the Member and the constituents.

The caseworkers take those stresses home with them. They might even work at home and it is hard to delineate work and home, but we have to look after our physical and mental health. If we manage teams and people, we have to treat them with respect and dignity and give them time off. It is so hard because it is so pressurised and you are dealing with political conflicts, media cycles and legislative processes, but you have to sit back and think, "How is this team working?"

The MMSST does a lot. Kim and her team support Members and proxy HR staffers with HR advice. It is even more important to go to them before something has become a disciplinary or grievance matter. Go to them to nip things in the bud. That was a big thing about the Speaker's Conference on the employment of Members' staff. Nipping things in the bud is a way to happiness and success in this place.

The engagement and events team that I lead and my excellent colleagues—including Jay, who is here, Gloria, Kennedy and Lydia—support Members' staff with forums, weekly meetings and road shows. We have annual conferences and the House Services fair to give support while not interfering with the employment relationship between the Member and the Member's staff. Networking between Members is so important. The HR team has a mentoring scheme between office managers sharing best practice and supporting each other. Dr Weinberg talked about lack of control. This brings control and agency back to Members' staff.

Interestingly, at the road show in February, staff who worked for an Independent Member said, "This is so reassuring and comforting that I am getting support that we do not get from a political party". If you are in a political party, you will get your own support. Independent Members are



by themselves, so it is quite unique where you can have an impartial sharing of best practice and it does work.

- Q105 **Alberto Costa**¹: Can I ask a follow-up before I come back to Dr Weinberg, if I may? Thank you very much for your evidence about the huge increase in constituency work, which most colleagues would agree with. I try my best with my team not to work at capacity, if I can use that management speak, but often my team is working at capacity. Do you think that there could be an argument that we need to see how we can add resources to ensure that staff are not always working at capacity? That might mean being able to employ maybe a sixth member of staff to ensure that there is a fair allocation of work and they are not constantly working at capacity. Do you agree with that?

Josephine Willows: That would be a matter for IPSA, as you know, because they fund the Members' staff for the offices. I think everyone wants to work at full capacity. One thing we are doing, and it sounds small, is commissioning *Working for an MP* to write a casework guidance document to say what Members can and cannot deal with, working smartly to use another jargon. You are the owners of the data on the casework coming but I think it was last week that *The House* magazine published an article saying that you get more than 1,000 a month. That is a lot of emails for three, possibly four, full-time equivalent members of staff to deal with, as well as everything else, dealing with constituency visits and your visits in the constituencies.

Chair: Thank you. I will go to Dr Weinberg in just a second. Tessa Munt wants to come in on that.

- Q106 **Tessa Munt:** If I may, because I was just looking at something that came into my inbox yesterday. This is an IPSA quote from yesterday: "I would advise that all officers look at who they are responding to and prioritise. You do not need to reply to everyone."

I would like some of the IPSA staff to come and work in my office and work out who they do not want to reply to and then come back in a month's time and deal with the complaints. You say 1,000. I probably get somewhere like 700. We have done a bit of work on this; well, I was doing a bit of work on this during the recess. I get about 700 cases a month that are personal, and then there are thousands of emails that are policy-related or talking about things like what is colloquially referred to as the assisted dying Bill or whatever else, or arrangements for pets going abroad, and goodness knows what else. Very often those emails are not the standard emails that are put together by the campaign groups. They have a couple of sentences within them that say, "My dog, Pip, got caught by this and we had to do this, that and the other".

I have to say that I was at boiling point yesterday when I saw that—not for me; I don't give a toss, because I will just carry on; I'm the one who asked to do this job. It is utterly unfair on my team to ask them to just

¹ Alberto Costa subsequently declared as a relevant interest that he employs his wife as a member of his staff.



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leave some of this out, because if we screen out people who are not constituents, we are left with constituents. If Parliament wants me to have theoretically 71,000-and-a-bit constituents, in reality that is probably nearer 85,000 because there are so many people who live within my patch but do not register. I think that somebody needs to do some job swapping here so they can be on the sharp end. I don't know how you manage that—I do not mean you, sorry; I do not know how one manages that. I think it is incredibly unfair—not on me, as I say, but on my team—to expect people to prioritise constituents, especially when constituents will present with one problem and it is masking a multitude of fundamental issues that are below it.

Sorry, I just had to say something because I was in orbit about this last night. I do not think it is very fair. I go back to what Alberto was saying about capacity. If people want us to deal with their problems, and they do because if they have taken the effort to contact their MP, we should be doing something about it. We need to make sure that my team's mental health is up together so they can just carry on—and carry on, and carry on. We thought last summer was going to be a bit quieter, but it wasn't.

Chair: That is a real *cri de coeur* there. Jo, I bet you cannot come in on all of that. There was a lot going on.

Josephine Willows: I think to your last point, for your staff to carry on and carry on and carry on—no, because they need breaks. Some Members and offices have a response email saying we will respond in so many hours unless it is very urgent. They have a list of what senders can and cannot expect, so telling the writers that this is the case about certain things and for them not to expect a reply within 24 hours. That is one aspect and I cannot comment on the other aspect.

Chair: That is helpful. Thank you, Jo. Alberto, sorry, we took things slightly sideways.

Alberto Costa: I just want to give Dr Weinberg the opportunity to answer the question as well.

Dr Weinberg: If I may, as a citizen of the country and therefore not an employee of Parliament, my answer to the question is: absolutely. We need more resources, we should have more resources. If we want democracy to work effectively—and the keynote of that, I imagine, is representing the people, and casework is an excellent example of that—my question as an outsider to Parliament is: why are we trying to cut corners? Surely that is the fundamental thing.

I appreciate that there will be bits of the organisation—IPSA, you have mentioned—that will say, “Well, there is a finite amount of resource”. If we look at how much is required, can that be grown, so that people can have what they need? Staff can do the job and MPs can represent everybody as they are entitled to be represented. I appreciate that there is also the political angle, which is selling that idea to the public, but I think if people were aware of the potential for short-changing the public, that is not what



people want. People want a democracy that works. That is my answer as an outsider and perhaps it is easy for me to say that is the case.

To go back to the main question about particular issues, and Jo was talking about the MP's staff, where does the responsibility lie? Is there a duty of care? If there is not, shouldn't there be one, to MPs and to MP's staff? Who will pick up the buck for that? Surely that should exist—again, as it would in other workplaces, as required by the law in fact. Again, I would say that needs to be sorted out, if it is not already, to try to make things comparable with the rest of the country. I think we have just had a flavour of why and how the unremitting long working hours culture works there.

I know I do not need to tell you, but for the record, there are issues for politicians to do with trust, and expectations are paramount from a public perspective. There is also pressure on reputation, presenting a certain profile and for what as colleagues and I working on this call political labour, to ensure that we are giving the message that is in line with what the party may say or what people might want to hear or even what the bottom line is for all we can deliver. These are key requirements in this particular area of work, as there are in others, but perhaps not quite to the same degree.

Another thing that has not been mentioned so far—well, just briefly, I suppose—is the issue of security and safety. In the surveys I have been doing with MPs' staff, and we have just got the fifth annual one under way now, one third or more of MPs' staff won't tell people what they do for a living. I think that tells you all we need to know about how confident people are feeling about the workings of this place and what we can say to the public. I know that IPSA is doing work on that to reach out with citizens assemblies. We need many more of them in every constituency, so that the public knows what it can expect and to have a say and feel some sense of ownership over this place, in addition to once every five years, or more frequently, voting for the people who put themselves forward and want to work hard to make a difference.

There are lots of differences between the political workspace that includes politicians and MPs' staff and other workplaces, plus the other things, small matters such as you might get fired on television in the middle of the night during the end of an election campaign. That does not happen in many other jobs. These things stand out. Has entitlement to parental leave been sorted? Is that clear? Is it taken up by colleagues of yours? Is that something that people feel confident about doing? All these are big issues and I think that safety and security is a big one as well. I know there is lots of work going on with constituencies around that.

Q107 **Alberto Costa:** If I may very briefly, you said the phrase “duty of care”. As a lawyer, I understand what that means. You are advising this Committee that to safeguard the mental health of MPs, there has to be some form of duty of care, perhaps from the corporate body towards MPs?

Dr Weinberg: I would say so. I am not a lawyer myself, I am a psychologist, but I am saying that I think that could be a helpful thing and then rather than there be a sense—I may or may not be right about this—that this is a nice to have, that it is nice to have good mental health support; it is essential for MPs and also for MPs' staff.



Q108 Bambos Charalambous: I have a question for Josie and Tanya. It is about what, in the time that you have been in post, you have seen in MPs' stress levels. Have you seen an increase? How have you seen MPs access support for stress, depression or anxiety? Have they accessed the Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service in the time that you have seen?

Josie Lazenby: Thank you for the question. As I mentioned previously, I have been here approaching four years in May, and what I have observed is that there is an increased perception of safety and security, as Dr Weinberg mentioned, which drives anxiety and potentially feeds into an already pre-existing condition about their safety. Social media plays an enormous part these days. I think that is an emerging trend across the world, in that nothing is sacred, everything is out there, and every moment is lived, potentially, by social media. There are many positives to that, with the increase in reach and communication, which is absolutely a good thing, but perhaps sometimes that means that an MP is more accessible—or feels that they are more accessible—and the public are nearer. That comes with benefits as well as not quite so many benefits sometimes. That has been an increase.

I think that there is an increase in expectation, certainly seen in the new cohort of MPs from the general election. If you have had an experience, particularly around disability, accessibility or neurodiversity through schools, college, university and employment, you come with a certain expectation. While we are committed to developing our offer in that area, sometimes that can produce a degree of anxiety. It is working out what is needed for an individual in that moment to address any particular concerns they have, but also to be proactive to prevent something happening at the very earliest opportunity.

We welcome increased communication with parties and individuals, as is appropriate, to do that. I have certainly seen that trust, as Dr Weinberg mentioned, in accessing our services. We see that, and we welcome it. We actively go out to talk to Whips and all-party groups, wherever we are invited, and sometimes where we are not. We might pop up and try to convey the message that we are trusted, professional, approachable and are there to support the very core health of MPs and their ability to deliver to the remit in Parliament.

I have definitely seen, over the time, an increase in those types of stress. We are really committed to having an open door and we do see people come through the door. We have our multidisciplinary team, whether that is occupational health, wellbeing, counselling, psychology that we need, and we can access additional services as is relevant and supportive to a person in the workplace context.

Chair: Thanks, Josie. We have got about 20 minutes. Could we move things forward at pace, please, and try to shorten questions and answers to make sure we cover our agenda today? Is that all right?

Q109 Bambos Charalambous: My next question is to Dr Weinberg. You have suggested that MPs should have a regular annual health check to ensure that their jobs are not proving too stressful for them. Can you tell us a bit more about what the annual health check that you envisage should



include?

Dr Weinberg: My emphasis is on the psychological health part. There are physical health checks, which I know we will all be aware of. For screening and using a standardised and robust existing measure, there are those used in the household surveys, for example, across the country, which I have used in my own studies, and others are available. I know there have been discussions in the team about that kind of thing. Using a screening instrument every year would allow people to pick up on symptoms of distress with an individual. There is opportunity for a conversation. It could be an informal one. It might be signposting, "Here are some services". If things are not going so well at the moment, what can we do? It might equally be the opportunity to provide some other sources of support and referral, exactly as have been described. If you are running an Olympic team, this would be a matter of course. You would screen your elite athletes for a whole range of reasons, and why wouldn't you do it with people who are running the country?

It is definitely an important thing to do. There are examples of enlightened employers who have done this previously and successfully as well. It would also allow you, as an organisation, to pick up on trends or particular areas where maybe there are issues or time points. For example, following the expenses scandal, prevalence of psychological distress doubled among MPs, which is not surprising. Again, it is an opportunity to pick up on things early on.

Q110 **Bambos Charalambous:** Following on from that, this is a question for Josie: has the House looked at implementing an annual health check?

Josie Lazenby: Yes, and some of you may well have been party to that. We offer a lifestyle screening, which is predominantly a physical screen, but we are looking at introducing a mental health element to that or a generalised sort of questionnaire about how somebody is, what that might show. Somebody might not actually be presenting with psychological distress. That does not necessarily mean we don't want to do something at an early opportunity. Without going into too much detail, yes, in short, we do it, and we are looking to expand the offer.

Q111 **Tessa Munt:** The mindfulness courses seem to be very well received, but there seem to be barriers. There are always barriers to these things, aren't there? Certainly time and space seem to be a problem. Have you made any recommendations about how those difficulties might be overcome?

Tanya Harris: Yes, certainly. Actually this is very timely. We very much recognise that one of the barriers to Members, particularly accessing the mindfulness programme, is that normally it has been a five-week course, and that is quite a time commitment when they are incredibly pressured. From today, we are starting a refreshed mindfulness programme specifically for Members, where we are offering drop-in sessions and we are expanding those across the year. Whereas we would normally condense the five-week programme into one—which we know has been difficult and the take-up has been very, very low—we are extending that to throughout the year in blocks and themed sessions. Members who have never been before can drop in when they can, or those who want more of



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a permanent practice or regular practice can join as much or as often as they like. In trialling this new, more easily accessible mindfulness offer, we hope that it will encourage Members to feel that they can come without feeling they are missing out, or if they have missed out on one course, they cannot come back. That is not true.

Q112 Tessa Munt: Okay. How will Members and staff know about that?

Tanya Harris: We have done quite a big promotion. It is always really difficult to get out, so we work with our internal comms team to get messaging out there in the Members' bulletin and all the local communications channels. I just spoke to your Clerk about whether we could do something in your newsletter to get the information out to Members. The Speaker, through the Speaker's Office, has championed that for us. We have put up posters up and done flyers and included that in stalls. There is always something else we can do to try to reach the Member population. If there are any suggestions, please do share.

Tessa Munt: Lifts and loos.

Tanya Harris: On we go.

Chair: Of course, we would be happy to help.

Q113 Navendu Mishra: I have a very quick question as a supplementary to Tessa's. I have done the mindfulness course, last year or the year before. It was very good. Sadly, I was unable to do the entire six sessions. I know this is available to members of staff in Parliament and MPs and potentially Lords, but what about staff based in the constituency office?

Tanya Harris: Yes.

Navendu Mishra: Is it available on Teams?

Tanya Harris: It is on Teams. We found that once covid came, in-person was very much more of a challenge for individuals. We wanted to broaden that and recognise that Members' constituency staff would not be able to access that in person, so it is absolutely online. We have a dedicated course for them. We break it down into three. We have a House administrative course tailored especially for them. We have a course for Members' staff in constituency in Westminster, and we do a separate offer for Members. We make sure we tailor it as much as we can to those groups and make it as accessible as possible.

Q114 Navendu Mishra: That is really helpful, Chair. Would it be possible to get a digital copy of the leaflet for constituency staff via email to all Committee members?

Tanya Harris: Yes.

Navendu Mishra: I always find it really difficult to find digital versions of all these posters you see around Parliament. I would be really grateful if that could happen. Thank you.

Q115 Tessa Munt: A report came out of the Speaker's Conference in 2023 that talked particularly about the distress that is caused to Members' staff. What



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has the House put in place since that report was published? If you can summarise that briefly, that would be really helpful. Dr Weinberg, I wanted to ask your opinion about whether there are gaps, and what you might have recommended in that respect.

Josephine Willows: The MMSST, other teams in the House and IPSA have implemented the recommendations from the Speaker's Conference. We have all worked together collaboratively. We have launched the CPD-accredited training programme for Members' staff. On completion of a course, they can take their points to another workplace. We offer 60 regular courses, which the House administration funds so it is all free to Members' staff. The conference recommended new posts, HR practitioners who provide CIPD, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, qualified HR guidance, signposting and best practice notes to Members' staff. They do not give advice. The unions that the Members' staff belong to can give advice, but they have had over 200 cases since April 2025.

We have also launched a restorative practice service for Members and Members' staff. The service is run by an external organisation that supports offices using restorative measures to resolve workplace issues at an early stage. Members have a duty of care towards their staff. Although a Member's office is an extraordinary place and in particular circumstances, as we discussed at the start, at the end of the day it is an office with people working together. This service will provide that "nipping in the bud" to make sure Members' staff and Members are working collaboratively together.

Agatha, in the new post of wellbeing adviser that sits in Josie and Tanya's team, is fantastic. She provides impartial advice on workplace health and wellbeing and signposts to regular support services. She works closely with the MMSST. We work closely with the relevant trade unions and the MAPSA, and we have a new memorandum of understanding with those groups. Members' staff are not employees of the House administration. My role is to ensure that, as far as possible, the benefits that we as House staff get can be related to Members' staff. We have an employee's benefit support guide. We will soon have the Members' staff annual conference. It is about security and wellbeing. We are working with various people. Jennifer Lees-Marshment is an academic dealing specifically in HR issues in Parliaments in the UK and abroad and she is doing a workshop. She has talked to office managers before.

Going back to my previous point, it is about Members' staff working together, having agency together and collaborating together. We also work closely with the Wellness Working Group and appreciate their constructive feedback. They have their annual surveys, and we have acted on their recommendations from the previous survey in 2025.

Chair: You have covered a lot of terrain there, Jo.

Tessa Munt: Yes. It doesn't look like there are any gaps.

Chair: Dr Weinberg?



Dr Weinberg: Thank you for giving me the opportunity. It is fantastic what is being done already. It is absolutely brilliant. It is hard to shift things quickly in an organisation, as some may say, so this is great news indeed. I am going to utter the phrase, "Wellbeing is never over"—my apologies for that. As has already been mentioned, it is important to ensure parity of opportunity for constituency and Westminster-based staff. I wonder if Parliament can be even bolder. It has made this very clear statement that it wants to be an exemplar employer in what it is doing, by its actions. If we look at things like turnover, which is very high among MP staff, are there definitive lists? Are these things followed up? Are there exit interviews?

I have had the pleasure of working with the Wellness Working Group annually to look at surveys that show there are pockets of 10% to 15% of MPs' offices where things perhaps have not changed or will need to change, and it is not within the gift of the existing services to do that. Random checks, the opportunity to whistleblow in a way that can be then dealt with appropriately, is important without taking away the role of employer from MPs. It is making sure they are operating within what should happen.

Looking at the long working hours culture is important, and it is great that we have got the safety net and the stress management stuff, but if you start to look upstream at trying to prevent some of the issues, how long should anyone be working? Is it okay to have your phone or your communication systems off of an evening so you can enjoy some time away from the job, which will then benefit the person the following day? The science is very clear on this. There are a number of things that could be done. I am not criticising what already has been done, but there could be so much more, and I congratulate Parliament on the steps that it is already taken.

Q116 **Tessa Munt:** Thank you very much indeed. I want to ask about how we communicate with MPs' staff. Clearly it is up to us as individuals to communicate with our constituency staff, but I was not really joking when I said "lifts and loos". If there is something right there in front of you—if you are in this building for a long time, you almost certainly go to the loo at least once. It is about making sure that we have got stuff very visible. I'm not aware—it may be that I walk around with my eyes closed; I don't think so. If I go into my local pub, I see stuff on the back of the loo door, which is critical.

Tanya Harris: I take your point, and I think certainly we can do more in the area. It is always a challenge with the turnaround and the communications in all different areas, where everyone is fighting for space. We touched on our Employee Assistance Programme briefly earlier. That can offer a broad range of support for individuals independently and can help with a whole range of issues from stress at work to personal issues. As I say, that is not just a matter of allowing them to access counselling sessions, which they can—up to 10 sessions—but also a broad range of financial support and legal information. I think we need to get out more posters for the assistance programmes and potentially look at making sure that everyone is aware of that. We work very closely with our Members' Staff Services colleagues. I think the introduction of the new wellbeing



adviser post helps bridge those gaps and tries to get in all those communication routes where we can. I appreciate that visibility is key, so we certainly can do more on that.

Chair: I have to nudge you all along.

Q117 **Mary Glindon:** Thank you for talking about how we can keep mental health and wellbeing at a good level. Dr Weinberg and Josie, sadly we know that a mental health crisis can happen at any time. Apart from “nipping in the bud”, how can we do that more effectively to provide earlier support and prevent a serious problem occurring?

Dr Weinberg: I will be very quick. Going back to screening again, it would be very helpful to extend that to staff as well as Members. I realise that there will be resource implications, but there are ways of doing this relatively briefly, and certainly we have demonstrated that with the annual survey, so that we can pick up on where people might need more help, signposting, a referral. Equally, again, it is awareness. You never know at what point you will need some services, and things may have passed you by until you are suddenly faced with the situation. If you are experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety, one of the things you are less able to do than otherwise is to scope around for things. Your attention will be narrowed as part of that situation.

It might be an unusual role for the Whips Office, but again a responsible one if we take the duty of care seriously and that becomes a thing. This applies to the role of party officials and agents as well. Family members will know when an MP is struggling. If there is some point of contact, through the services already offered, it can help offset things before they take hold.

Q118 **Mary Glindon:** Josie, the mental health first aider network has been successful in signposting at the point of engagement. Can more be done to support this network and the value it provides?

Josie Lazenby: Yes, we are really pleased with the increase in mental health first aiders across the parliamentary estate. We now have 130, which is a real improvement on the numbers that we had before. Those individuals are having transformational conversations every day as part of their day-to-day work, but also when someone is in distress or needs just an additional level of support, a coffee, that sort of sight, “Are you okay?” We have an increasing link with Mental Health First Aid England and our wellbeing adviser is currently speaking directly to Mental Health First Aid England to increase that reach. We are also looking at all of the support tools and thinking about training. Can we bring some of that training in-house to widen the message, not necessarily train mental health first aiders but certainly increase it so that there is parity in communication between what is happening nationally, outside, and what is happening with us. We are headed in the right direction and there is more to be done.

Q119 **Navendu Mishra:** Most MPs are here three or four days a week when the House is sitting. I am usually in my office in my constituency on a Friday and maybe on a Thursday, so my office manager is basically the person who looks after staff welfare. Office managers are obviously critical in



dealing with crisis, illness issues and so on. Does the House provide suitable training to office managers on dealing with sensitive conversations? What more could be done in this area, such as mandatory training?

Josephine Willows: We have a weekly office manager call-in for an hour, highlighting various services we give. We have lots of training on offer, dealing with interactions with constituents, essential writing skills, media handling and social media. With your specific question about how office managers line manage, Kim and her team do a lot of work supporting office managers and them supporting each other. There is a lot, but I think the role of an office manager is a very hard one. We can do so much but we cannot interfere with the employment relationship between the Member and the office manager. It goes to the core of the issue. If the office manager is well equipped and feel physically and mentally well themselves, they will be able to support the other staff.

Q120 **Navendu Mishra:** I get that. Thank you for that. There are some mandatory training modules that MPs and staff have to do. For example, I was being chased yesterday to do a fire safety module for training. My question was specifically around mandatory training for office managers because office managers tend to be from a cross-section of society, from different workstreams before they come into Parliament to work. The question was specifically, if I could press you on that: is there any consideration of mandatory training?

Josephine Willows: For the House administration to say it has to be mandatory to Members or Members' staff is difficult because of the lack of employment relationship. The behaviour code training programme is not mandatory for Members but the majority have done it. It is not mandatory but highly recommended for Members' staff. There has been something like a 200% increase since the last general election. It is more like a thing that you do, rather than saying it has to be mandatory and it is a stick. You just say, "Well, this is part of your induction". In all inductions we send an email telling them all about the services we offer and the courses that they really should take. It just falls short of mandatory.

Dr Weinberg: As an outsider, if I may, I am not bound by the constraints of this. It should be mandatory if you are an MP or a Member's office manager who, as you say, has been not involved in management or not had the best experiences in the past. I think it is incumbent again on the House to make sure that MPs go through that in the same way that fire and safety is an essential. Why would we think any differently about the safety of people's mental wellbeing?

Navendu Mishra: Thank you. That is really helpful.

Chair: Lovely. On behalf of our Committee, I thank all our witnesses for talking to us today and answering our questions. It has been a really worthwhile session and I think it will be a big help for our report. Thank you for that, and we will now conclude this part of our session. Thank you all.