

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Note of discussion for the meeting held on 4 May 2020 at 4.00pm

[Meeting held over Microsoft Teams as a videoconference]

Members present:
Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair)

Michael Fabricant	Mrs Maria Miller
Marion Fellows	Mark Tami
Sir Greg Knight	Giles Watling
Mrs Pauline Latham	

Apologies: Colleen Fletcher

1. Informal Note

The Committee **agreed** the informal notes of the meetings on 18 March and 27 April 2020.

Matters arising **COVID-19**

A Member asked if the Committee had been provided with information on staff sickness levels during the COVID-19 pandemic and the advice issued by Public Health England. The Chair said that the House of Commons Commission had discussed staff sickness levels and the House had been working directly with Public Health England in its response to the pandemic.

2. Restoration and Renewal Sponsor Body consultation strategy

John Thursfield, Engagement Strategy Manager, R&R Sponsor Body, briefed the Committee.

Several Members recalled the Committee's 2019 visit to Buckingham Palace to learn about their restoration programme. They indicated it had been helpful and informative and recommended the Sponsor Body meet with the same representatives from the Palace. Mr Thursfield said he would take this recommendation back to the Sponsor Body.

A Member asked how the work of the Sponsor Body fitted in with the work of the House authorities. Mr Thursfield said that the Sponsor Body and House authorities were keenly aware of the need to work closely together to ensure value for money. He gave an example of how the House's Moves Programme was working closely with the Northern Estate Programme.

A Member asked how Members would be consulted on and informed about R&R during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr Thursfield said that the immediate issue was to determine when consultation should take place, and whether Members had the time to participate given the circumstances. He added that the programme team were looking at new ways to engage Members, which included digital platforms.

A Member asked if the consultation would consider the diverse needs of Members, such as those who had to travel long distances to get to Westminster. Mr Thursfield said that the

Sponsor Body was keen to ensure that the views of all Members were taken into account. He added that they wanted to reconcile such barriers and that a one-size-fits-all approach would not work for the consultation.

A Member asked for a list of the membership of the Sponsor Body. Mr Thursfield said he would provide this.

A Member asked how the Sponsor Body would interact with the Committee. Mr Thursfield said that there were a number of roles for the Committee, particularly as a useful sounding board for different options and designs and to discuss the requirements of Members.

A Member asked if the Committee's views on R&R would be reported to the Commission, and if the Committee would be informed should the Commission take a different view. The Chair said that he would report back to the Committee and also noted that the views of Members across the House would be sought.

Decision

The Committee **noted** the Sponsor Body's Member Consultation Strategy.

3. Working Practices of the Committee: Administrative Matters

Rob Cope, Clerk, briefed the Committee.

Member to deputise for Chair

Members discussed whether to nominate a deputy chair. Several Members noted there had not been a deputy chair with the previous Committee. Members agreed that the Chair could appoint a deputy on an ad hoc basis.

Decision

The Committee:

- **noted** the information in the paper;
- **agreed** to continue the practice of publishing brief unattributed informal notes of the discussions of its meetings on the Committee's website; and
- **agreed** that when necessary the Chair would nominate a Member of the Committee to take the Chair in his absence.

4. Work, role and remit of the Committee

Rob Cope, Clerk, briefed the Committee.

The Chair said that it was important for the Committee to have a strong relationship with the Commission and suggested that the two bodies could meet regularly to discuss their work.

[In the absence of the Chair, Maria Miller deputised for the rest of the meeting]

A Member asked if a paper could be brought to the Committee on banqueting, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of social distancing.

A Member asked how food and drink prices at House catering and drinking venues were determined. Mr Cope explained that the previous Committee had agreed that prices would be increased in line with inflation each year to de-politicise the process. He added that price changes were put to the Committee in the annual Fees and Charges schedule. A Member then suggested commissioning a paper on the on the range of goods available in catering venues and their pricing mechanisms.

A Member suggested that an evidence-based strategy was required to ensure that the services offered by the House Service reflected the needs of Members. They suggested commissioning a paper on work being undertaken across the House to determine the views of Members, staff and visitors on the services provided. Mr Cope suggested that Evaluation and Insight Team could attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss their work in this area.

Decision

The Committee **agreed** its remit for the 2019 Parliament to be proposed to the House of Commons Commission at its next meeting.

5. Member Communications and the Committee

Decision

The Committee **noted** *The Fortnight* publication for Members.

The Committee will next meet on 11 May 2020 at 4.30pm