

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Note of discussion for the meeting held on 18 May 2020 at 4.30pm

[Meeting held over Microsoft Teams as a videoconference]

Members present:

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair)

Michael Fabricant

Marion Fellows

Sir Greg Knight

Mrs Pauline Latham

Mrs Maria Miller

Jessica Morden

Giles Watling

Harriett Baldwin also attended under the provisions of paragraph (1)(e) of Standing Order No 137A (Select committees: power to work with other committees)

Apologies: Mark Tami

1. Informal Note

The Committee **agreed** the informal notes of the meeting on 4 May 2020.

2. Banqueting and events during the COVID-19 pandemic

Richard Tapner-Evans, Director of Catering, In-House Services, briefed the Committee.

Mr Tapner-Evans said that the Committee was being asked to endorse the decision for House of Commons banqueting functions and events to remain closed until the end of August owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, though if Government advice changed in the interim the decision would be reviewed and he would provide an update to the Committee.

A Member asked whether the deposits paid by those who had booked functions on the Estate would be refunded either if an event was cancelled or if the number of attendees had to be reduced due to social distancing measures. Mr Tapner-Evans said that deposits were already being refunded where functions had been cancelled, and if any were held while social distancing rules were still in place where attendee numbers were lower than originally expected and the deposit proved greater than the final cost, the difference would be refunded to the organiser.

The Chair suggested that the Committee consider the provision of banqueting and events on the Estate in more detail at a future meeting.

Decision

The Committee **endorsed** the position that banqueting and events remain closed until the end of August.

3. Proposed changes to Parliamentary passes

Ugbana Oyet, Serjeant at Arms, and Andy Martin, Head of Access and Services, briefed the Committee. [*Harriett Baldwin, Chair of the British Group Inter-Parliamentary Union, also attended*].

Inter-parliamentary Groups (IPGs)

Mrs Maria Miller declared an interest as she was an executive member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK.

A Member asked why an additional pass category had been proposed for staff of the Inter-parliamentary Groups when the existing arrangement seemed to work well and when the broader aim of the proposals was to reduce and simplify the number of pass categories. The enhancement of access and escort rights granted under the proposed new category had not been requested by the IPGs, while the staff of the IPGs felt a strong attachment to the House and moving them to a new pass category risked alienating them.

Mr Oyet said that the creation of a new pass category was to help House staff such as doorkeepers and security officers to quickly recognise a passholder's access rights without having to challenge them. The number of categories had been reduced in the current proposal though an essential new category had been proposed to encompass the increasing number of embedded contractors employed on the Restoration and Renewal Programme. He noted that the reduction in the number of categories had taken some time and been achieved with difficulty but that the proposals recognised the nuances and requirements of each category. Mr Martin reiterated the points made.

Ms Baldwin said that the BGIPU objected in principle to the proposal to introduce a new and distinct pass category for IPGs and asked that the Committee reject it. She noted that the proposal was based on a misinterpretation of the role of the BGIPU and would lead to its being viewed as external organisation when in fact its work was integral to the work of Parliament. Mr Oyet said that the main reasoning behind introducing a new pass category was to enable House staff such as doorkeepers and security officers to quickly identify whether a passholder had the right to access a particular area of the Estate without having to challenge them.

The Chair asked how many passholders would be affected by the creation of the new category and asked if there would be a diminution in access or escort rights if the current arrangement was to continue and whether it would be possible to do so. Ms Baldwin added that the need for staff of the IPGs to book meeting rooms was not a key consideration as IPGs already had a longstanding right to book rooms. Mr Oyet said that the change would affect 64 passholders. If the existing arrangement continued, then the staff of the IPGs would not be able to book meeting rooms in their own right and would have to rely on their Chairs to act as sponsors, they would also have the right to escort fewer guests than under the proposal. He added that he would speak to colleagues in the Lords to see whether it would be possible in principle to maintain the existing arrangement. Mr Martin said that he saw no operational issues in continuing with this arrangement.

Spouse/partner and family member passes

A Member noted that they saw little benefit from the measures already implemented to transfer spouse/partner passes, which had already caused disquiet among some Members and risked alienating others. They asked if it would be possible to move those passes back to their original category. Mr Oyet said that the change followed an IPSA requirement

where a spouse/partner employed by a Member was treated as a “connected party” under their costs and expenses scheme. It also contributed to security on the Estate and the integrity of Parliament’s IT network.

Other points

A Member sought clarification on whether the pass category for Members of the European Parliament (orange with red stripe) had already been phased out. Mr Oyet said that they had and that he would update the paper to reflect this.

A Member asked whether it was recognised that the number of passholders had increased and whether there was a corporate view on this. Mr Oyet said that the number of passholders on the Estate had increased and would continue to do so as major construction projects such as the Northern Estate Programme and Restoration and Renewal got underway. He added that the number of passes issued to Members’ staff had decreased. Mr Martin noted that some Members were still in the process of recruiting staff after the General Election which had contributed to the lower number of passes issued.

A Member asked what security checks were carried out for contractors before they were issued with a pass and whether they were subject to a code of conduct while working on the Estate. Mr Martin said that all contractors were subject to strenuous security checks while the companies that employed them were also subject to a corporate review undertaken by the Parliamentary Security Department.

The Chair noted that a full discussion was needed on passes for the staff of political parties and asked if a paper could be produced for a future meeting.

Decisions

The Committee:

- A. **Agreed** not to introduce a new pass category for staff of interparliamentary groups.
- B. **Noted** the introduction of a new pass category for the R&R Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority.
- C. **Agreed** to the extension in the Commons of the spouse/partner pass to include other family members in appropriate circumstances.
- D. Accepting that it was a decision made by the previous Committee, **confirmed** the principle whereby a spouse who was employed by a Member should be in receipt of an employee pass in order to work on the Estate.
- E. **Agreed** that the qualification period for a former Member’s pass should remain at least one full Parliamentary term.
- F. **Agreed** the introduction of a new category of pass for lay members.
- G. **Noted** the introduction of passes for fixed-term contractors, and passes for embedded contractors.
- H. **Endorsed** the continuation of existing arrangements relating to staff working for APPGs, and **noted** that the rules relating to those staff are strictly enforced.

I. **Agreed** to consider at a future date whether to introduce a new pass colour for staff of political parties, including the distribution of passes amongst those groups.

J. **Confirmed** existing arrangements for UK representatives of Overseas Territories; and that there was no requirement for UK representatives to receive security passes or greater access to the Estate.

4. Derby Gate Pass Issuing Office interim move

John Cryer, Director, Northern Estate Programme, Dominic Bransden, Head of Accommodation, In-House Services, and Laura Fox, Head of Personnel Security, Parliamentary Security Department, briefed the Committee.

Mr Cryer said that due to NEP works required at the Derby Gate entrance gate, it was proposed to relocate the temporary pass issuing office. The Derby Gate works had been due to be completed in August but had been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms Fox said that the Derby Gate portacabin had been in place since 2015 as a temporary measure. The structure was no longer fit for purpose as space was limited and social distancing measures could not be implemented effectively, there were often long queues and a fast-track service could not be provided in the space. She added that the proposed new location would be better suited to the requirements of the Pass Issuing Office and enable staff to provide a better and more efficient service.

Several Members supported the interim move as an alternative meeting space would be made available and they appreciated the problems presented by the existing arrangement.

The Chair asked why the work to Derby Gate was unable to go ahead when other construction sites in the UK had continued to operate through the pandemic. Mr Cryer said that the decision had been taken to suspend works on the Estate until social distancing could be achieved. He said that the Programme team was now working with contractors to put social distancing in place so that works could restart as soon as possible, however these constraints would mean that works would not restart at full productivity levels. While other construction sites in the UK were open, they were not necessarily working at the same efficiency. He added that the Programme team was looking at solutions to ease the constraints of social distancing, such as extending working hours.

A Member asked whether all works in the Northern Estate Programme were being conducted to facilitate the plan to convert Richmond House into a temporary Chamber as part of Restoration and Renewal. Mr Cryer said that the historic buildings on the Northern Estate were in need of investment regardless and that in some cases repairs were needed as urgently as in the Palace.

A Member asked if permission was required from English Heritage to conduct work on the Derby Gate entrance gate. Mr Cryer said that the Programme team was working closely with them to address any heritage concerns.

The Chair suggested that the Committee agree that the Pass Issuing Office be moved with the proviso that an alternative meeting room be made available immediately.

Decision

The Committee:

- **agreed** to the interim move of the Derby Gate Pass Office, subsequent to the refurbishment of two photocopier rooms, and the provision of a new meeting room; and
- **noted** that a further meeting room would become available once the refurbishment of that building had been completed.

The Committee will next meet on 8 June 2020 at 4.30pm