



The Speaker's  
Conference

# Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff: first report

## First Report 2022–23

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 26 October 2022*

**HC 692**

Published on 31 October 2022  
by authority of the House of Commons

## Speaker's Conference

On 22 June 2022, the House passed an Order to establish a Speaker's Conference as follows:

This House considers that it is desirable to consider the employment conditions of Members' staff in order to ensure a more inclusive and respectful working environment, and accordingly agrees that the following Order be made:

(1) There shall be a committee to be known as the Speaker's Conference which shall consist of the Speaker, who shall be Chair, and up to 14 other Members appointed by the Speaker [after consultations with the business managers of parties represented in the House].<sup>1</sup>

(2) The Speaker shall appoint one or more of the members of the Conference to act as vice-Chair in his absence.

(3) The Conference shall consider and make recommendations upon the contractual arrangements for the employment of Members' staff.

(4) Notwithstanding any Standing Order of this House, the Conference shall conduct its proceedings in such manner as the Speaker shall determine.

(5) The Conference [and any sub committees thereof that the Speaker shall appoint] shall have power—

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House and to adjourn from place to place;

(b) to report from time to time;

(c) to appoint legal advisers, and to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference.

(4) The Conference shall produce its first report to the House, which shall include a description of the principles underpinning its work, no later than 31 October 2022.

(5) The quorum of the Conference shall be five.

(6) This Order shall have effect until the end of the current Parliament.

### Current membership

[Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP](#) (*Speaker, Chorley*) (Chair)

[Sir Graham Brady MP](#) (*Conservative, Altrincham and Sale West*)

[Wendy Chamberlain MP](#) (*Liberal Democrat, North East Fife*)

[Tracey Crouch MP](#) (*Conservative, Chatham and Aylesford*)

[Wayne David MP](#) (*Labour, Caerphilly*)

[Clive Efford MP](#) (*Labour, Eltham*)

[Julie Elliot MP](#) (*Labour, Sunderland Central*)

[Florence Eshalomi MP](#) (*Labour, Vauxhall*)

[Laura Farris MP](#) (*Conservative, Newbury*)

[Marion Fellows MP](#) (*SNP, Motherwell and Wishaw*)

[Rt Hon Mark Harper MP](#) (*Conservative, Forest of Dean*) (14.10.22 – 25.10.22)

[Andrew Jones MP](#) (*Conservative, Harrogate and Knaresborough*)

[Paul Maynard MP](#) (*Conservative, Blackpool North and Cleveleys*)

---

<sup>1</sup> Votes and Proceedings, [22 June 2022](#), item 13

[Rt Hon Dame Maria Miller MP](#) (*Conservative, Basingstoke*)

[Mary Robinson MP](#) (*Conservative, Cheadle*)

### Publication

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2022. This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at [www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright-parliament/](http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright-parliament/).

Conference reports are published on the Conference's website at <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/609/speakers-conference/> and in print by Order of the House.

### Conference staff

The current staff of the Committee are Keely Bishop (Conference Operations Officer), Dr Rebecca Davies (Clerk), Sonia Draper (Conference Operations Officer), Helen Emes (Deputy Speaker's Counsel), Lloyd Owen (Second Clerk), Mike Page (Private Secretary to the Managing Director of People and Culture), Chris Sear (Director of Members' Services Team)

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Speaker's Conference, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 3440; the Committee's email address is [speakersconference2022@parliament.uk](mailto:speakersconference2022@parliament.uk).



# Contents

---

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Part 1: Overview</b>	<b>4</b>
Members' Staff: current situation	4
Members' Services Team	5
UK and International Comparators	6
Historical Overview	6
<b>Part 2: Our approach</b>	<b>12</b>
Principles	12
<b>Annex 1: Terms of Reference and call for evidence</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Formal minutes</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Published written evidence</b>	<b>18</b>



# Introduction

---

1. On 22 June 2022, the House passed an Order to establish a Speaker's Conference, with a specific remit to consider "the employment conditions of Members' staff in order to ensure a more inclusive and respectful working environment".<sup>1</sup> The Order requires the Conference to consider these matters and to make recommendations on the contractual arrangements for the employment of Members staff. The Conference is required to produce its first report to the House, outlining a description of the principles underpinning its work, no later than 31 October 2022.<sup>2</sup>
2. On 25 July 2022, Mr Speaker published a notice inviting Members and Members' staff to submit their views to the Conference.<sup>3</sup> This set out his intention that the Conference would consider the challenges and benefits that arise from Members' directly employing their own staff and whether contractual changes and changes to the support provided to Members and their staff by the House of Commons authorities could deliver improved support for Members and Members' staff.
3. Members of the Conference were formally appointed by Mr Speaker on 14 October 2022. This was later than anticipated due to the resignation of the then Prime Minister and the subsequent appointment of a new Prime Minister, and then by the death of her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Given the delay, officials were tasked by Mr Speaker to gather factual material from key organisations and stakeholders. Mr Speaker is grateful to all of those who have contacted him and the staff, and who have met with us to date. We will continue this dialogue.<sup>4</sup>
4. Part 1 of this report sets out the current arrangements for the employment of Members' staff and a brief overview of the historic background which provides the context of current arrangements. In Part 2 we set out our approach and the key principles which will underpin the work of the Conference going forward.<sup>5</sup>

---

1 Votes and Proceedings, [22 June 2022](#), item 13

2 Ibid

3 "[Speaker's Conference](#)", Parliamentary Intranet, 28 June 2022

4 [Written evidence](#)

5 Annex A sets out the detailed terms of reference for the next phase of our work.

## Part 1: Overview

### Members' Staff: current situation

5. Members recruit and employ their own staff; however, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) provides model contracts for staff as well as the budget to employ them. IPSA was established by the Parliamentary Standards Act, which received Royal Assent in July 2009. It is an independent body, with three main responsibilities as follows:

- to regulate Members' staffing and business costs.
- to determine Members' pay and pension arrangements.
- to provide financial support to Members in carrying out their parliamentary functions.<sup>6</sup>

6. As of 24 August 2022, there were 3,622 Member's staff who were registered with IPSA and paid by allowances funded by IPSA. Some Members may employ staff using other methods, of which there is no record.<sup>7</sup> In 2021–22 the total costs for staffing and Covid staffing budgets was £111,198,724.29, an increase of approximately £5,500,000 over 2020–21.<sup>8</sup>

Financial year	Total spend from staffing and Covid staffing budgets
2020–21	£105,737,939.76
2021–22	£111,198,724.29 <sup>9</sup>

7. The IPSA staffing budget is currently designed to enable a Member to employ five full time equivalent (FTE) staff. There is no minimum or maximum number of staff who can be employed by an individual Member, but costs relating to their salaries, NI contributions, pension contributions and any other costs (such as health and welfare) must be affordable within the overall budget limit.<sup>10</sup>

8. Members' staff turnover is relatively high, with staff turnover at 30.23% in 2020, following the December 2019 General Election.<sup>11</sup> This rate has since reduced.<sup>12</sup>

2019	28.75%
2020	30.23%
2021	24.38%
2022	17.61%

6 IPSA, [Who we are](#), accessed 26 October 2022

7 Members are not obliged to employ staff through IPSA and may, if they choose, use other sources of funding.

8 IPSA (SPC0014). The total spend figures cover the staffing budget and additional budget provided for Covid workload. They do not include costs claimed from other budgets – such as staff absence costs, staffing costs incurred during the winding up period (for those MPs who left Parliament) or costs allocated to the contingency or disability budgets.

9 IPSA (SPC0014) Information relating to 2021–22 is in the process of being confirmed via the annual publication process and so numbers may be subject to change.

10 There are seven standard job roles available for staff who are funded by IPSA, three in the administrative job family, two in the Executive job family and two in the Research job family.

11 IPSA (SPC0014)

12 IPSA (SPC0014). In the same period, House staff turnover ranged between 6.6% (2020–21) and 13.6% (2018–19).



## Members' Services Team

9. The Members' Services Team (MST) was established in April 2020. The Team was set up as a result of the Gemma White QC report into the bullying and harassment of Members' Parliamentary staff (see para 27 below). Amongst other initiatives, the report recommended increased support for Members as employers, and the introduction of pastoral care and signposting to key services for Members' staff.

10. The MST provides a Members' HR Advice Service that supports Members (or a nominated HR proxy) in their role as employers of their staff. The Members' HR service was initially established in 2001 and was expanded from two to four staff when the service joined the MST in April 2021.

11. The House has historically offered some direct services for Members' staff, particularly in recent years, but much of this was ad hoc. For example, the House began running regional constituency events for Members' staff in 2014, and although these were virtual during the pandemic, face to face events have recently begun again. The Employee Assistance programme, run by Health Assured, was introduced specifically for Members' staff in 2014.<sup>13</sup> Different House teams also allow Members' staff to access and use services.<sup>14</sup>

12. MST offers Members' advice on a whole range of employment issues. In September 2022 alone, over 100 Members approached the team for support, bringing 199 cases.<sup>15</sup> The team also publishes a range of best practice employment guides for Members, which are supported by regular employment workshops targeted at Members. These guides are designed to support Members in their roles as employers and give practical, step by step advice on employment practices. Guides available to date (and published on the Intranet) include appraisals and one-to-one meetings, managing long- and short-term sickness, grievance, managing misconduct, office restructure and recruitment and selection.

13. The Team also offers engagement and pastoral support to all Members' staff, including contact with all new Members' staff as soon as they have an IT account, signposting to key services, a regular all-Members' Staff phone-in on topics relevant to MPs' staff and regular communications about House services and events.<sup>16</sup> The MST runs weekly phone-ins for those staff managing Members' offices (since 2020), virtual drop-in sessions, an Office Manager training course and regular regional constituency events.

14. In addition, the team oversees a number of Member-related insurance policies, undertakes research into Member and Members' Staff engagement and interaction with House services (brought into the MST in April 2021), and is shortly to take on responsibility for MPs' staff training.<sup>17</sup>

---

13 It was subsequently extended to Members and staff of both Houses.

14 For example, the Digital Local Engagement Team visit MPs' constituency offices and regularly engage with their staff; and MPs' staff can access and use procedural Member Hub on their Members' behalf. The House also runs a death in service scheme for Members' staff. More information is available in the [Members' Staff Handbook](#).

15 In comparison, previous figures are as follows: April 2020, 18 MPs & 24 cases; April 2021: 77 MPs, 114 cases; April 2022: 96 MPs, 171 cases.

16 Topics have included dealing with suicidal constituents, the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme, and Restoration and Renewal).

17 Parliamentary Intranet, [Insurance](#), accessed 26 October 2022

## UK and International Comparators

15. Both the Scottish and Welsh Parliament (Senedd Cymru) have similar arrangements to Westminster for the employment of Members' staff, whereby each Member employs their own staff within a statutory regulatory framework which covers some, but not all terms and conditions. Each has a designated body responsible for determining the structure and rules on staffing and administering payrolls, which publishes guidance to Members as employees and mandatory policies, such as the rules around claiming staff salaries.<sup>18</sup>

16. The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) is responsible for the administration of the Scottish Parliament, including setting the framework for Members' pay, expenses and staffing.<sup>19</sup> The governance structure in the Senedd lies somewhere between the arrangements in Westminster and those in Scotland. As in Westminster, an independent statutory body, the Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd (the Board), created in 2010, sets the framework within which members employ their staff. Like IPSA, the role of the Board includes establishing pay scales and standardised contracts and developing a range of employment-related policies. However, the day-to-day administration of the Determination for Members of the Senedd is carried out in-house. This is conducted by the Members' Business Support team, which sits within the Senedd Commission.<sup>20</sup>

17. In the New Zealand Parliament, Pāremata Aotearoa, Members' staff are employed by the Parliamentary Service rather than by the MP. The Parliamentary Service is independent from Parliament, operating as one of the state services, but it is accountable to the Speaker of the Parliament. This employment model is referred to as a triangular relationship and includes the Member, the support staff, and the Parliamentary Service, with the Member acting as the day-to-day manager. The employment arrangements and recruitment are facilitated by Member Support Staff Managers.<sup>21</sup>

## Historical Overview

18. Staff support for Members has been a feature of Parliamentary life since the 19th century, although it has developed and changed substantially during that time.<sup>22</sup> Funding for staff support for Members has been in place since the late 1960s, and has gradually grown as the workload of Members, particularly constituency casework, has increased.<sup>23</sup>

---

18 The Constitution Unit Blog, [As the House of Commons begins to look at a new employment model for MPs' staff, we should look to other legislatures to see what we can learn from them](#), accessed 18 October 2022

19 Ibid. See also Office of the Deputy Chief Executive, [The Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme and Report of the Review of Members' Staff Cost Provision](#), (November 2020)

20 Ibid. See also Remuneration Board, [The Determination on Members' Pay and Allowances for the Sixth Senedd \(Number Two\)](#) (March 2021) and Remuneration Board, [The 2019 Remuneration Board review of staffing support for Members of the Senedd](#) accessed 26 October 2022

21 Ibid. See also New Zealand Parliament, [Members' Guide \(Aratiki Mema\) to the 52nd New Zealand Parliament 2020](#) (September 2020)

22 The Constitution Unit Blog, [The evolution of MPs' staffing arrangements: how did we get here?](#), accessed 14 October 2022

23 Ibid.

## Timeline<sup>24</sup>

1969	An Office Costs Allowance (OCA) is introduced for Members. Costs set at £500 per annum to cover one full time secretary.
1971	The Top Salaries Review Body (TSRB) is established.
1972	OCA is increased to £1000, a proportion of which can be spent on research assistance.
1977	MPs are allowed to use the whole OCA allowance for secretarial or research support.
1978	House of Commons Commission is established by the House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978 as the employer for House of Commons staff.
1979	Departmental Select Committees established
1984	The OCA is indexed to civil service salaries.
2001	-OCA separated into Staffing Allowance and Incidental Expenses Provision. -Allowance increased to cover 2 staff. -Standard contracts and pay scales introduced.
2007	Staffing allowance is increased to cover 3.5 staff per Member.
April 2009	House of Commons Commission publishes its report Employment of Members' staff by the House.
July 2009	The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) is established by the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009.
November 2009	Committee on Standards in Public Life publishes its report MPs expenses and allowances: Supporting Parliament, safeguarding the taxpayer.
2012	Staffing allowance is increased to cover up to 4 staff per Member.

24 Adapted from Rebecca McKee, The evolution of MPs' staffing arrangements: how did we get here?

July 2018	The Independent Complaints and Grievances Scheme (ICGS) Delivery Report is published by the House of Commons Commission.
October 2018	Dame Laura Cox QC publishes her independent inquiry report <i>The Bullying and Harassment of House of Commons Staff</i> .
July 2019	Gemma White QC publishes her independent inquiry report <i>Bullying and Harassment of MPs' Parliamentary Staff</i> .
2020	The House of Commons service establishes the Members' Services Team.  Staffing allowance is increased to cover up to 5 staff (and to cover additional staffing costs as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic).
March 2022	The Speaker of the House of Commons announces his intention to establish a Speaker's Conference to review the employment arrangements for staff.
June 2022	House of Commons passes an Order to establish a Speaker's Conference to consider "the employment conditions of Members' staff in order to ensure a more inclusive and respectful working environment".
August 2022	Covid 'uplift' in staffing budget made permanent.

### *House of Commons Commission, Employment of Members' staff by the House*

19. In April 2009, the Government proposed a series of changes to the system of allowances.<sup>25</sup> One of these proposals was that Member's staff should (without exception) become direct employees of the House of Commons.<sup>26</sup> On 30 April 2009, the House agreed with the Government's motion that "staff who work for an hon. Member should be employed by the House" and tasked the House of Commons Commission to make recommendations for the implementation of this decision.<sup>27</sup> The Commission published its report on 27 October 2009.<sup>28</sup>

20. The Commission identified four key challenges which would need to be addressed in order to implement the resolution of the House.

25 At that time, the system was administered by the House Administration. Since July 2009 (when the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009 came into force) these allowances have been administered by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA).

26 HC Deb, 21 April 2009, [cols 10WS-11WS](#) [Commons written ministerial statement]

27 HC Deb, 30 April 2009, [cols 1063-1142](#) [Commons Chamber]

28 House of Commons Commission, [Employment of Members' staff by the House](#), HC 1059, 27 October 2009

- i) How the House could fulfil its legal responsibilities as the employer of Members' staff.
- ii) In particular, how it could discharge its responsibilities as an employer in respect of Members' staff based in the constituencies and how it could be a good employer rather than a remote bureaucracy in these circumstances.
- iii) How the consequences of a general election with a large turnover of seats, and especially a large transfer of seats between parties, could be coped with.
- iv) How the additional costs of the House employing Members' staff could be minimised.<sup>29</sup>

21. While the Commission made a series of practical recommendations for implementing the House's proposal,<sup>30</sup> it did not commend the scheme to the House.<sup>31</sup> It concluded that the proposal would: have heavy costs: would secure no clear benefit: would place Members' staff in an ambiguous employment relationship; and would significantly reduce the flexibility Members had to manage their staff.<sup>32</sup> Instead, the Commission stated that its preference would be "for the House (or if appropriate IPSA)" to give greater support to Members as employers.<sup>33</sup>

### *Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL), MP's expenses and allowances: Supporting Parliament, safeguarding the taxpayer*

22. Though finalised before it received a copy of the House of Commons Commission's report, the CSPL's report, published in November 2009 commented on the House's proposal that the House should employ Members' staff. It suggested that "Members should follow high standards of employment" and that there should be "broad parity of treatment for Members' staff across the House of Commons".<sup>34</sup> However, it concluded that central employment of staff was not necessary to achieve such standards.<sup>35</sup> Instead it recommended that "MPs should continue to be able to select and directly appoint their own staff" and should "receive appropriate training and HR support".<sup>36</sup>

### *The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA)*

23. The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) was established by the Parliamentary Standards Act, which received Royal Assent in July 2009. IPSA was required to run a scheme for Members' allowances to be in place following the General Election of May 2010.<sup>37</sup> The subsequent consultation on the operation of the scheme did not raise

29 House of Commons Commission, [Employment of Members' staff by the House](#), HC 1059, 27 October 2009, para 19

30 House of Commons Commission, [Employment of Members' staff by the House](#), HC 1059, 27 October 2009, para 104

31 House of Commons Commission, [Employment of Members' staff by the House](#), HC 1059, 27 October 2009, para 105

32 Ibid

33 Ibid

34 The Committee on Standards in Public Life, [MPs' expenses and allowances: Supporting Parliament, safeguarding the taxpayer](#), Twelfth Report, Cm 7724, November 2009, para 6.46–6.47

35 House of Commons Library Paper, [Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff, 27 July 2022](#), Research Briefing number 9572

36 The Committee on Standards in Public Life, [MPs' expenses and allowances: Supporting Parliament, safeguarding the taxpayer](#), Twelfth Report, Cm 7724, November 2009

37 House of Commons Library Paper, [Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff, 27 July 2022](#), Research Briefing number 9572

the question of the employment of Members' staff, but the final Scheme confirmed that nothing in the Scheme "shall be taken to affect the MP's position as the employer of their staff".<sup>38</sup>

### *The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS)*

24. In response to allegations of inappropriate behaviour in Parliament and subsequent media coverage in November 2017, a cross-party working group was established, under the leadership of Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP, then Leader of the House.<sup>39</sup> In July 2018 the group published the ICGS Delivery Report, which set out a new Parliamentary Behaviour Code, and policies and procedures for reporting allegations of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct. The report was endorsed by the House of Commons on 19 July 2018.<sup>40</sup>

25. Further allegations of inappropriate behaviour by Members against staff, highlighted by Newsnight in March 2018 led to an independent review of bullying and harassment in the House of Commons. Dame Laura Cox QC published her report on 15 October 2018.<sup>41</sup> She recommended three fundamental changes to the ICGS: abandoning the Valuing Others policy and the Revised Respect policy (agreed in October 2018); that non-recent allegations of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct were eligible under the ICGS scheme (implemented in July 2019); and that, for cases where Members' were the subject of allegations, no Members' should play any part in the ICGS process (which led to the establishment of the Independent Expert Panel in June 2020).<sup>42</sup>

26. Though the creation of the ICGS has no impact on the contractual basis for the employment of Members' staff, the scheme currently covers over 15,000 members of the parliamentary community across both Houses, including Members' staff visitors and contractors.<sup>43</sup> In the four years since its establishment, the ICGS has received 176 disclosures from the Helpline, opened 231 cases and resolved (either formally or informally) 133 cases. The 4th Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme's Annual Report was published on 25th October. This reporting year, the ICGS team received 52 disclosures from the ICGS Helpline. From these, 59 cases were started, and 21 cases were completed, with 48% upheld and 52% not upheld.<sup>44</sup>

### *Gemma White QC Bullying and Harassment of MPs' Parliamentary Staff*

27. In July 2019, Gemma White QC published her report Bullying and Harassment of MPs' Parliamentary Staff.<sup>45</sup> Though not specifically commenting on the employment status of Members' staff, she identified "no set of uniform employment procedures for MPs and their staff" and "no collective oversight of MPs' employment practices".<sup>46</sup> While

38 Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, *The MPs' Expenses Scheme*, March 2010, HC 501, 2009–10, para 8.7.

39 UK Parliament Independent Complaints and Grievance Policy Programme Team, *Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme Delivery Report*, 17 July 2018

40 HC Deb, 19 July 2018, [column 627](#) [Commons Chamber]

41 Dame Laura Cox DBE, *The Bullying and Harassment of the House of Commons Staff*, Independent Inquiry Report (October 2018)

42 Ibid

43 For example see the report of the Independent Expert Panel, *The Conduct of Mr Christian Matheson MP*, HC 823

44 The 4th Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme's Annual Report, *ICGS 4th Annual Report 2021–22.pdf* ([parliament.uk](#)), 25 October 2022

45 Gemma White QC, *Bullying and Harassment of MPs' Parliamentary Staff- Independent Inquiry Report*, 19 July 2019, HC 2206, 2017–19, para 9

46 Ibid

several submissions to her inquiry recommended that Members' staff should be employed by an independent body, she concluded that such a proposal was "not appropriate".<sup>47</sup> She explained that:

Many Members of Parliament are good employers and in any event a change of employer would not in itself resolve the issues which arise from the day to day working relationship between Members and their staff.<sup>48</sup>

Instead, and regardless of employer, she identified that "a properly resourced proactive, department with responsibility for overseeing employment practices in MPs' offices" was required.<sup>49</sup> On the basis of that recommendation, the House established the Members Services Team (MST) in March 2020 (see paras 9–14 above).

### *Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff*

28. On 30th March 2022, the Speaker announced his intention to set up a Speaker's Conference to review the employment arrangements for Members' staff.<sup>50</sup> He said:

It is time to consider radical action and review structures and processes that could make a difference. Some serious allegations have been made, which we must address as a matter of urgency. It is imperative we do the right thing by staff, and MPs as well. [...] I want to make sure everyone feels supported and has somewhere to turn—and make this House not only a safe and inclusive workplace, but a model for other legislatures.<sup>51</sup>

---

47 Gemma White QC, *Bullying and Harassment of MPs' Parliamentary Staff- Independent Inquiry Report*, 19 July 2019, HC 2206, 2017–19, para 14

48 Ibid

49 Ibid

50 *It's time for a re-think on MPs role in staff issues*, The Guardian, 30 April 2022.

51 Ibid

## Part 2: Our approach

---

29. As noted above, on 22 June 2022, the House passed an Order to establish a Speaker’s Conference, with a specific remit to consider “the employment conditions of Members’ staff in order to ensure a more inclusive and respectful working environment”.<sup>52</sup> The Conference is required to produce its first report to the House, outlining a description of the principles underpinning its work, no later than 31 October 2022.<sup>53</sup>

30. This preliminary report draws on both the correspondence received and discussions to date to set out the principles which will underpin the work of the Conference going forward.

31. While many of the challenges and issues which need to be addressed have been rehearsed before, most notably in the House of Commons Commission’s 2009 report (see para 19 above), there have also been significant changes since then, not least in the creation of IPSA and of the in-house Members’ Services Team. While in 2009, the majority of Members’ staff were opposed to any changes in their employment status, their views are now more mixed. Based on the informal discussions we have undertaken so far, the GMB are advocating for Members’ staff to be centrally employed.<sup>54</sup> Other staff groups, Unite, MAPSA (the Members and Peers Staff Association) and the Wellness Working Group (a group established by Members’ staff to consider issues around the wellbeing of those who work for Members) are keen to understand the practical impact of any proposals on Members’ staff before coming to a firm view.<sup>55</sup>

32. We will therefore consider these issues anew and produce a further report which will set out a number of options in relation to the contractual arrangements for Member’s staff. We intend to publish this report before the February recess. The terms of reference for the next stage of our work and call for evidence are included in Annex A of this report. In its 2009 report, the House of Commons Commission noted the criticism that there was no consultation before the House took its decision on the Government’s proposal in April 2009. The Commission recommended that there should be “extensive consultation both with Members and their staff on a specific, detailed proposal before it is put to the House”.<sup>56</sup> We agree, and following the publication of our options report we will engage in extensive consultation with Members and their staff, before presenting our final recommendations to the House before summer recess 2023.

33. The principles which will underpin those options and our work going forward are set out below.

### Principles

**We recognise the unique and valuable role of Members’ staff. The Conference will seek to ensure that the support provided to Members’ staff and their employment arrangements enable them to fulfil this key role within the Parliamentary community.**

---

52 Votes and Proceedings, [22 June 2022](#), item 13

53 Ibid

54 GMB (SPC0016)

55 Unite (SPC0015)

56 House of Commons Commission, [Employment of Members’ staff by the House](#), HC 1059, 27 October 2009, para 106



**We recognise that Members should retain involvement in recruitment and selection decisions relating to their staff.**

**We will seek to build on the work undertaken and services provided by the Members' Services Team and others to improve support for both Members and their staff.**

**We recognise the role of IPSA in the current arrangements and acknowledge the importance of working in collaboration with IPSA to deliver any future proposals.**

**We will evaluate the legal and practical implications of a range of options for the House to consider, setting out the relative costs and benefits of each option.**

The rationale underpinning these principles is set out in more detail below.

**We recognise the unique and valuable role of Members' staff. The Conference will seek to ensure that the support provided to Members' staff and their employment arrangements enable them to fulfil this key role within the Parliamentary community.**

34. One of the key challenges for Members' staff identified in our informal engagement was the overall workload and the negative impact that this had on staff.<sup>57</sup> Although the IPSA staffing budget has recently increased, it is still felt to be insufficient.<sup>58</sup> Many contributors expressed the view that the nature of the work undertaken by Members' staff is not well-supported by the House. In particular, the harrowing nature of many constituency cases means that the mental health impact of working in a Members' office can be quite challenging, and current support is not seen to be sufficient.<sup>59</sup>

35. Some contributors raised concerns about career progression for Members' staff. This was in part due to the constraints of IPSA funding; in that it was difficult to provide substantial progression within an overall cost ceiling without detriment to other staff.<sup>60</sup>

36. Others identified a significant cultural disconnect between constituency staff and Westminster, both in terms of access to development opportunities and the way that they are treated when they visit the estate.<sup>61</sup> Any proposals we produce in future must recognise the part played by members of the Parliamentary community, wherever they are based.

37. We are not seeking at this stage to take a view on whether there should be changes to the employment relationship between Members and their staff. It is clear that there are a range of views on this issue. Some staff groups are keen to explore the possibility of Members' staff becoming House employees, while a significant proportion of individual contributors (particularly contributions received from Members themselves) were not in favour of a structural change.<sup>62</sup>

38. Nevertheless, it is clear that the current contractual arrangements can create challenges, particularly where relationships had frayed or broken down. Several contributors highlighted the difficulty staff had in seeking to resolve issues, for fear of

---

57 Carolyn Hughes (SPC005); Wellness Working Group, Response to Dir Weinberg's Report on Modernising Parliament: Supporting the Wellbeing of Members Staff, May 2022

58 Katherine Hopkins (SPC007), Anonymous (SPC011), Anonymous (SPC012).

59 Wellness Working Group, Response to Dir Weinberg's Report

60 Anonymous (SPC011), Anonymous (SPC012), Unite (SPC015)

61 Anonymous (SPC009)

62 E.g. Sir Desmond Swayne (SPC001), Sarah Coleby (SPC003), Max Darby (SPC004)

losing their jobs.<sup>63</sup> Others highlighted the power imbalance, with Members themselves making decisions about matters in which they may have themselves been involved.<sup>64</sup> Some contributors noted that there were also challenges in resolving issues between staff (for example, between office managers and other staff),<sup>65</sup> and challenges where Members themselves were the recipient of poor behaviour from their own staff.

39. The issues raised during our informal consultation are at the heart of what the Conference is seeking to address, and we will continue to engage with Members and their staff to ensure that any proposals we make provide clear benefits to the Parliamentary community.

**We recognise that Members should retain involvement in recruitment and selection decisions relating to their staff.**

40. The 2009 Commission Report on the Employment of Members staff by the House recommended that Members' retain a significant role in recruitment and selection of staff, noting that:

The relationship between Members and staff is a highly personal one, and personal loyalty is vitally important; it is also essential in small teams that everyone can work well together.<sup>66</sup>

41. The overwhelming majority of the informal contributions we have received reinforce this view, irrespective of views as to whether Members continue to directly employ their staff, or whether the House of Commons Commission or another body become the employer.<sup>67</sup>

**We will seek to build on the work undertaken and services provided by the Members' Services Team and others to improve support for both Members and their staff.**

42. The Members' Services Team has received excellent feedback from Members and Members' staff since it was set up in 2020. The HR service is used extensively by Members, and the engagement work the team undertakes has provided support for many Members' staff both in Westminster and in constituencies. The Members' HR Advice service has also developed a suite of best practice guides for Members that can be accessed by Members' staff. We fully acknowledge the impact the Team has had. However, we also note that in order to increase the Team's engagement and support for Members' staff, and to increase the Team's ability to advise Members on HR matters, more resources would be needed by the Team.

**We recognise the role of IPSA in the current arrangements and acknowledge the importance of working in collaboration with IPSA to deliver any future proposals.**

43. We acknowledge any changes in contractual arrangements would have an impact for IPSA as it would directly affect the scope and volume of their existing work.

---

63 E.g. GMB (SPC016), Sarah Coleby (SPC003)

64 Unite (SPC015)

65 E.g. Sue Hynard (SPC006)

66 House of Commons Commission, [Employment of Members' staff by the House](#), HC 1059, para 16

67 E.g. Sarah Coleby (SPC003), Anonymous (SPC010), Unite (SPC015)

**We will evaluate the legal and practical implications of a range of options for the House to consider, setting out the costs and benefits of each option.**

44. Changing the employer of Members' staff would have clear and significant legal implications. As the employer of their own staff, Members currently exercise control over how that relationship is managed and they are also responsible for the work involved in fulfilling the duties which flow from being an employer. If the House (or any other body) were to employ Members' staff, then those duties and responsibilities would shift to the new employer, thereby releasing Members from the associated workload. However, control of how that employment relationship is managed would also have to shift to the new employer; otherwise, the new employer would have responsibility without power.

45. In particular, while Members could continue to have significant involvement in some issues such as the recruitment of staff, key decisions on issues such as workplace grievances, disciplinary matters and the ending of an individual's employment would have to be made by the employer. This is the logical counterpoint to the fact that the potential liability which may arise from those issues would primarily lie with the employer. If a new employer is to be asked to assume those risks, then they will reasonably wish to have control over those decisions, in order to manage the potential for liability and associated costs.

46. Any proposals produced by the Conference will therefore need to give due consideration to the legal and practical implications of any recommendations.

## Annex 1: Terms of Reference and call for evidence

---

The Speaker's Conference has been established to consider the employment conditions of Members' staff, in order to ensure a more inclusive and respectful working environment.

Currently, Members of Parliament directly employ their own staff, requiring each MP to act like a small business, managing recruitment, retention and development of their staff, as well as handling any issues that might arise in the course of employment.

The Conference will examine the current contractual arrangements through which Members employ their staff, and present recommendations as to whether there is sufficient evidence in favour of changing the current arrangements.

It will seek to establish the challenges arising from the existing provisions for employment of Members' staff. It will consider whether changes to the contractual arrangements for staff, and/ or other practicable changes to the support provided to Members and Members' staff by the House authorities, could deliver improved support for Members and Members' staff, and in doing so promote a more inclusive and respectful working environment.

It will also consider the benefits of the current arrangements for both Members and Members' staff and explore how these can be maintained in any future arrangements.

The Conference is keen to seek written evidence from Members, their staff, and external organisations, on the following questions:

- What are the legal and administrative arrangements by which Members employ their staff?
- How might the House better support Members and Members' staff with matters relating to their employment and Members' roles as employers?
- What changes are required to the role of IPSA in matters relating to the employment of Members' staff?
- What other issues need to be considered in order to ensure a more inclusive and respectful working environment for Members' staff?
- What arrangements exist for staff in supporting Parliamentarians in other jurisdictions?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of Members being the employers of their own staff?

# Formal minutes

---

**Wednesday 26 October 2022**

## **Members present**

Mr Speaker, in the Chair

Sir Graham Brady

Wendy Chamberlain

Tracey Crouch

Wayne David

Clive Efford

Julie Elliott

Marion Fellows

Andrew Jones

Paul Maynard

Dame Maria Miller

Mary Robinson

## **Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff: first report**

Draft Report (*Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff: first report*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Paragraphs 1 to 46 read and agreed to.

Annex agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

## Published written evidence

---

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

SPC numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete

- 1 Coleby, Sarah (SPC0003)
- 2 Darby, Max (SPC0004)
- 3 GMB Union (SPC0016)
- 4 Anonymous (SPC0012)
- 5 Hopkins, Katherine (SPC0007)
- 6 Hughes, Carolyn (SPC0005)
- 7 Hynard, Sue (SPC0006)
- 8 Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) (SPC0014)
- 9 Anonymous (SPC0011)
- 10 Leadsom MP, Rt Hon Dame Andrea (SPC0002)
- 11 Anonymous (SPC0010)
- 12 Anonymous (SPC0009)
- 13 Swayne MP, Rt Hon Sir Desmond (SPC0001)
- 14 Unite Union (SPC0015)
- 15 Anonymous (SPC0013)
- 16 Anonymous (SPC0008)