

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Note of discussion for the meeting held on 6 July 2020

[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

Jessica Morden
Mark Tami
Giles Watling

Apologies: Mrs Maria Miller

1. Informal Note

The Committee **agreed** the informal notes of the meeting on 29 June 2020.

Matters arising

Travel Office Consumer Panel

Marion Fellows, Chair of the Travel Office Consumer Panel, provided an update following the meeting of the Panel on 2 July.

The Panel had agreed its revised terms of reference, received an update on the re-procurement of Travel Office services and had a useful presentation on service provision in recent months from Corporate Travel Management, the current provider.

The Committee **noted** the update.

2. Proposed change to the Northern Estate Programme

Ian Ailles, Director General of the House of Commons, briefed the Committee.

Mr Ailles presented a proposed revision of scope for the Northern Estate Programme prior to its consideration by the Finance Committee and the House of Commons Commission. Under the proposal, the construction of the temporary Chamber in Richmond House would be separated from the wider works on the Northern Estate so that progress could be made on the Norman Shaw buildings and 1 Parliament Street to provide refurbished accommodation for Members.

The Chair noted that the Committee's remit did not extend to wider strategic decisions relating to NEP and R&R as its role focused primarily on the provision of facilities and services, which would be the main focus of its future involvement in NEP and R&R.

Decision

The Committee was grateful for being consulted but felt that this was a matter best dealt with by the House of Commons Commission and Members of the House.

3. Members' accommodation in Richmond House

Ian Ailles, Director General of the House of Commons, Dominic Bransden, Head of Accommodation, and Patsy Richards, Decant Director, In-House Services and Strategic Estates, briefed the Committee.

Ms Richards provided an overview of the feasibility and estimated costs of using Richmond House to accommodate Members decanted from other buildings on the Northern Estate during refurbishment works.

The Chair thanked Ms Richards and Mr Bransden for organising a tour of Richmond House for Members of the Committee earlier that day. He emphasised the Committee's role in working with the programme team to ensure that the provision of facilities and services in Richmond House fully reflected the needs of Members.

4. Resumption of banqueting and paid-for tours

Richard Tapner-Evans, Director of Catering, In-House Services and Strategic Estates, and Edge Watchorn, Managing Director, Participation, briefed the Committee.

Mr Tapner-Evans and Ms Watchorn put forward a proposal for a phased approach for the resumption of banqueting events and paid-for tours on the Estate.

Mr Tapner-Evans clarified that under the current proposals only Member-sponsored events would resume from September and not third-party activities.

The Chair asked Ms Watchorn for her views on paid-for tours. Ms Watchorn said that there was a need to balance the number of visitors on the Estate at any given time to ensure that they did not impact on the work of the House. There was also a fundamental question to address on whether Parliament should be open to visitors when it was not sitting and whether it was desirable to charge certain audiences for access. The pandemic had provided an opportunity to accelerate the ongoing work to consider these issues and the Committee would receive an update on its outcome at the end of the year.

The Chair asked what the outlook was for banqueting events and visitor access to the Estate. Mr Tapner-Evans said that the view among industry colleagues was pessimistic. Recovery would take time and banqueting events would have to operate under a different model in the foreseeable future. Ms Watchorn said that the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions was not expecting inbound tourism to return to pre-COVID levels until 2024 or 2025.

A Member asked if more school visits could be facilitated as engaging with young people was an important aspect of the work of Members. Ms Watchorn said that her team was considering how social distancing measures could be introduced in the Education Centre. Facilitating visitors was a priority and was also dependant on the advice issued in each of the constituent nations of the UK. She added that a number of online activities had been made available during the pandemic.

A Member said that while caution was admirable, if a vaccine was to be developed visitor numbers might quickly rebound. Ms Watchorn said that the purpose of the operational flexibility principle was to be able to accommodate sudden improvements in visitor numbers, or alternatively accommodate a worsening situation where visitor operations needed to be shut down quickly.

5. Derogation request: Industry and Parliament Trust Annual Cycle Challenge

The Clerk briefed the Committee.

Decision

The Committee **agreed**:

- the Industry and Parliament Trust's request to host its annual Cycle Challenge in the Atrium of Portcullis House in November; and
- to delegate similar future requests for decision by the Chair.

The Committee will next meet on 13 July at 4.30pm.