SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes

Thursday 16 January at 1pm in Committee Room 2

Present:
Lord Laming (Chairman)
Lord Ashton of Hyde
Lord Campbell-Savours
Lord Judge
Lord Stoneham of Droxford
Lord Touhig
Baroness Wheeler

Together with the Clerk of the Parliaments.

Michael Winders (Director of Communications) and Carl Woodall (Director of Facilities) were also in attendance. Andy Piper (Design Director, R&R Programme Delivery team), and James Baker (Design Lead, BDM) attended for item 3; Malcolm McBride (Deputy Fire Safety Manager) attended for item 4; David Johnstone (Senior Facilities Manager) attended for items 5 and 6; Stephen Perkins (Head of Catering and Retail Services) attended for items 6, 7 and 8; and Eric Hepburn (Director of Parliamentary Security Department), Jamie Smith (Assistant Director, Strategic Estates) and Ashley Fuller (Project Lead, Strategic Estates) attended for item 9.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Lord Borwick, Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope and Baroness Morris of Bolton.

2. Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting (minutes previously agreed by correspondence)

The minutes of the Committee's October meeting had previously been agreed by correspondence. The Committee were informed that the new PDS drop-in location agreed by the Committee at its last meeting was now in operation and working well, with the coaching service having vacated the Salisbury Room. The Chair thanked those involved in making this happen.

3. House of Lords Decant Project: Proposed location of Chamber, Committees and Catering functions (S/20-21/1) [RESTRICTED]

Andy Piper and James Baker presented the design options available to accommodate the Chamber, Committee Rooms and catering facilities in the QEII Centre. The Committee considered and discussed:

- The choice between a double height or triple height Chamber and the implications this had on the space available for other facilities.

- The assumption that the number of seats in the Chamber remained the same but with improved accessibility and increased wheelchair spaces; further consideration had been given to how flexible seating options may further the accessibility of the space. It was noted that seating for Crossbench Peers would need to take account of the current provision of space other than on the crossbenches. It was noted that, should the Committee wish to consider it, it was possible to look at alternative layouts for the Chamber.
- The impact of the Committee Rooms being co-located on one floor versus being spread across multiple floors of the building, particularly in relation to visitor access and security.
- The provision of a staircase through the centre of the whole building to bring in natural light and improve access options between floors.
- The proposal for the top floor to provide the majority of catering services, a mixture of served and self-service; with the main preparation kitchen located in the basement.
- The lifts in the building would be upgraded to meet modern accessibility standards and extended to reach all floors.

Members' accommodation would be covered in the next paper to the Committee in February. It was noted that improving accessibility to office accommodation was as important as the proposed improvements to accessibility in the Chamber. It was confirmed that there would be at least as much member accommodation in the QEII Centre as there was currently available in the Palace of Westminster.

The location of members' support services would be developed once the steer on the location of the Chamber, Committee Rooms and catering facilities, and member accommodation, had been assessed.

The Committee agreed with the preferred options endorsed by the Management Board, locating the Chamber on the Ground Floor, all Committee Rooms on the Third Floor and the catering facilities on the Sixth Floor with smaller outlets located throughout the building.

The options would next be considered by the Commission. Wider engagement with members of the House would be undertaken between Easter and Whitsun before final proposals were put to the Committee and Commission for endorsement. A communications strategy was being developed by the shadow Sponsor Board.

4. Fire Safety training module (S/20-21/2) [RESTRICTED]

The Committee were informed that the proposed new module met all the requirements it had previously set out; it was user friendly, automatically sent an email to confirm completion and allowed for a quarterly list to be sent the Whips and Convenor detailing those who had not completed the training. A link to the module had been circulated to members prior to the meeting.

Members were reminded of the importance of fire safety training. In an old and complicated building it was vital that all those using the building were confident of what to do in an emergency. The Fire Safety Manager and Director of Facilities were available to attend party and group meetings to provide face to face briefings to members. This could be undertaken by Members in place of the online training. Consideration was also being given to arranging a Chamber briefing.

The paper also covered the evacuation procedure for members.

[INFORMATION REDACTED]

The Committee agreed to the rollout of the new fire safety training module and to the move to a dispersal policy for all members in the Palace of Westminster.

5. Oral update on the West Front Scaffolding (Cast Iron Roofs Programme)

The Committee was updated on changes to the sequencing of the Cast Iron Roofs Programme which had resulted in the date of the remaining sections of scaffolding having been brought forward. The resequencing allowed work to continue on the project following the discovery that the bomb-damaged tiles at the north end of the roof could not be used as a template for casting replacement tiles. The continuation of the scaffolding allowed for tiles at the south end to be used to produce the replacement tiles.

Due to the dissolution it had not been possible to bring a paper to the Committee prior to the work starting.

The Committee also discussed the pedestrian walkway used to separate pedestrians from vehicles whilst the scaffolding obstructed the pavement. It was confirmed that although the disabled car parking spaces had been displaced the same number of disabled spaced remained available to those requiring them.

6. Proposed changes to the House of Lords Terrace (S/20-21/3) [RESTRICTED]

The paper covered three issues related to the Terrace; proposed new furniture, smoking on the Terrace and inclusive staff access arrangements. The Committee first considered the proposed new furniture. The new furniture was to improve the accessibility of the Terrace, providing a lightweight and manoeuvrable alternative to the current furniture; increasing the flexibility of the layout of the Terrace and the ability of the Catering Service to accommodate the needs of customers.

The Committee questioned the cost of the furniture and were informed that a procurement exercise had been undertaken. The Committee felt it would have been useful to include additional information on any expected increase in revenue as a result of the change.

The Committee agreed to the reconfiguration of the Terrace seating area with new furniture to optimise accessibility for mobility equipment users and increase seating capacity.

The Committee next considered smoking on the Terrace. At its meeting in October 2019 the Committee agreed to move the Peers' smoking table into the designated smoking area and extend the current canopy to provide coverage and reduce the smoke drifting over other Terrace users. Due to heritage restrictions it was not possible to extend the canopy and further consideration had been given as to whether a freestanding structure could be used in its place.

In discussion, there was support for a full ban on smoking on the Terrace but concern that following the closure of the smoking area outside the Woolsack, removing the smoking area on the Terrace would leave only the smoking area in Black Rod's Garden.

The Committee asked that thought be given to an alternative smoking area should the smoking area on the Terrace be abolished.

The Committee confirmed that it was content for the more inclusive staff access arrangements, trialled during 2019, to be made permanent.

7. Annual review from Catering and Retail Services (S/20-21/4) [UNRESTRICTED]

The annual review had been due to come to the Committee's November meeting. Since the report was written the Catering and Retail Service (CRS) had increased its Sustainable Restaurant Association rating from two stars, to the maximum, three stars.

During the dissolution 1650 public dining covers had been served and the feedback had been overwhelmingly positive.

The Committee took note of the update.

8. Update on Catering and Retail Services operation of The Woolsack (S/20-21/5) [RESTRICTED]

Since CRS had taken over the running of The Woolsack the venue had been refurbished, the ambience had changed following increased training for staff and a more proactive management approach. A food offer had been introduced and communications sent out to encourage the use of the facility for meetings during quieter periods.

The Committee took note of the paper and thanked the staff for the successful start to the running of The Woolsack.

9. New Palace Yard Project: Delivery Impacts (S/20-21/6) [RESTRICTED]

The Committee was informed of the work of the New Palace Yard Project.

[INFORMATION REDACTED]

Due to the amount of work and the requirement to keep New Palace Yard as operational as possible during the project it would be broken down into phases: during each phase there would be different requirements for traffic management.

[INFORMATION REDACTED]

The project had been engaging with stakeholders over the last nine months and had shared the plans with the Administration Committee in the Commons. The paper provided an opportunity to raise any concerns to inform the production of the tender for the main contractor. The Committee was informed that the plans would increase the amount of traffic through the Palace.

[INFORMATION REDACTED]

Concerns were raised about pedestrians using the Spine Road and what would be done to reduce the potential for a collision between a vehicle and pedestrian as there were a number of areas where the Spine is used as a cut through. The Committee were informed that consideration was being given as to the required action to reduce the risk involved.

10. AOB

As part of the circulation the Committee's Forward Work Plan had been circulated along with a note on the heating and cooling of the Chamber and the operation of the Long Room. It was agreed that the temperature in the Chamber would be kept under review.

Further visits to the QEII centre were to be arranged. The clerk would circulate details to members once dates had been confirmed.

Following the clean up on the Peers' Cloakroom during the summer recess there remained a number of items that had not been collected. Details of the final opportunity for collection of items would be circulated to all members. The Chair asked that members encourage their groups to attend and collect the remaining items. Due to the limited space available for storage outstanding items would have to be disposed of at the end of January.

The next meeting will be on 13 February at 1pm.

Small sections of these minutes have been redacted, usually for reasons such as commercial confidentiality and sensitive management information.

Gabby Longdin
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