



## Finance Committee

### Minutes

Wednesday 21 February 2024 at 3.45pm in Committee Room 3A

#### Present:

Lord Morse (Chair)  
Baroness Buscombe  
Earl of Courtown  
Lord Reay  
Lord Stoneham of Droxford  
Lord Young of Old Windsor

together with the Clerk of the Parliaments.

Fehintola Akinlose (Finance and Commercial Director), Andy Helliwell (Chief Operating Officer) were in attendance. Chris Evans (Director of Project Delivery) attended for item 3. Claire Arlington (Head of Finance Business Partnering), Emma Gendall (Head of Employee Experience and Reward), and Aisha Bi (Head of Governance) attended for item 4.

#### Apologies

Apologies were received from Baroness Goudie and Lord Kennedy of Southwark

Lord Morse introduced himself as the new Chair of the Finance Committee.

The Chair welcomed the new members of the Committee, Baroness Buscombe, Lord Young of Old Windsor and in her absence, Baroness Goudie.

The Clerk of the Parliaments introduced himself to the new members as a regular attendee to the Committee in his role as Accounting Officer, Corporate Officer, and Employer of the House of Lords Administration.

The Committee noted that since they last met Lord Tomlinson had sadly passed away.

#### Agreeing the minutes of the previous meetings and matters arising

The Committee agreed the minutes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting.

#### Action Log

The Committee was provided with an updated action log had been circulated along with the details of the current forecast for the Hybrid Committee room project.

Following a request from Lord Hayward, the Committee considered the use and cost of traffic marshals on the estate. The Committee received an update from the Chief Operating Officer and the Director of Project Delivery.

The Committee noted the following:

- Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Clerk of the Parliaments and the Clerk of the House have a legal duty to ensure the safety of those visiting or working on the estate, as far as is reasonably practicable.
- Traffic marshals had had a larger presence on the Lords end of the estate since January 2023 in connection to the New Palace Yard works, but marshals had been in use on the estate to support construction projects since 2019.
- It was common construction industry practice to use traffic marshals where it was not possible to have separation between pedestrians and vehicles.
- The traffic marshals were procured through the public sector procurement framework and are used on a call-off basis. They were employed by external contractors, the management of those contracts sat with Strategic Estates.
- Regular reviews had taken place since the one-way system was implemented and marshal numbers had been reduced where possible. Marshals were not deployed in the evening when the House was not sitting, and their utilisation was paused altogether for a number of days over the Christmas recess.
- The marshals were used in addition to other risk mitigations in place, including the one-way system itself, speed limits, traffic calming, driver training, and signage.

The Committee asked about the cost of the marshals and how many were currently working on the estate. The total cost of marshals utilised across multiple projects on the estate from April 2019 to February 2024, was £3.15m. The cost of the marshals used to manage the temporary one-way system, was just under £700k in 2023. When managing the one-way system there were at present six marshals on the day shift and three on the late shift.

The Committee questioned the risk posed by pedestrians walking along the Corus Lane on Abingdon Street. It was confirmed that the signage had been reviewed but Parliament had limited influence over pedestrians using the area. The Committee noted that the pavement alongside the Palace belonged to Westminster City Council (WCC) and that whilst it had been highlighted to them as a health and safety risk, due to the interaction with traffic entering and exiting the estate, it was not currently an area of particular concern for WCC.

Following discussion of the costs and reasoning for traffic marshals on the estate the Committee agreed it was content it did not need to revisit the topic again.

**To Discuss: 2023-24 Q3 Combined Performance Pack F/23-24/15 RESTRICTED: MANAGEMENT**

The Committee was provided with the Q3 Combined Performance Pack for discussion. The Head of Finance Business Partnering presented the finance data in the pack.

In Q3 there had been overspends in the Catering and Retail Service, the Parliamentary Digital Service and Strategic Estates. Reasons for overspends varied by department but included for all three areas the increased cost of interim and agency staff. The overspends in some areas had been offset by vacancies in other areas. The Hybrid Committee Rooms project forecast was overspent due to the revised delivery schedule of a substantial amount of equipment for the project. The Committee noted that there was currently a £1.1m

forecast overspend in capital, this was being closely monitored to ensure spend was brought in line with the revised budgets by year-end.

The Committee asked about the understaffing in Visitor Services, and the protest disruption resulting in tour cancellations. It was confirmed that for security reasons, Parliament Square protests can restrict visitor access, causing tours to be cancelled. One reason for understaffing in the team was that some resource has been transferred to Speaker's House tours, which had not formed part of the original budget. The Committee noted that the delays to the Archives Relocation Programme were short term operational issues that were expected to be resolved quickly.

The Head of Employee Experience and Reward introduced the people data in the paper and highlighted that the vacancy rate had decreased by 4.2% from last year. The Committee noted that the vacancy rate was now at 13.6%, and that it was recognised that further work was required to get to the 8% target. The Committee recognised the impact of high vacancy rates on staff wellbeing and asked which mental health services the administration provided. The Committee was informed that there was an Employee Assistance Programme in place, which provided staff access to six free sessions of counselling, alongside occupational health support from the Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service. HR was also using its own data and the results of the most recent staff survey to help pinpoint and target these issues.

The Head of Governance introduced the performance data. The Committee noted that key changes included the dip in performance around objective one: Provide excellent services to facilitate the work of the House and its Members, and that the red rating on objective three: Make Parliament More Safe, Secure and Sustainable was due to the Parliamentary Maintenance Service team (PMST) being unable to provide information. The Committee shared concern about the risks of not having data from PMST and requested that they come to a future meeting if there was no progress on this by the next quarter.

The Committee noted that the low uptake on contract management training was due to the fact that it had been redesigned and was due to be relaunched, and therefore contract managers were waiting to take up the new training.

The Committee took note of the update.

## **To Discuss: Committee Operating Framework Review F/23-24/16**

UNRESTRICTED

The committee clerk introduced the Committee Operating Framework and the proposed changes made in line with new ongoing work. The Committee was supportive of the new steps taken to share committee forward work plans on ParliNet, but stressed the importance of keeping the communications clear, such as through limiting abbreviations and acronyms.

The Committee discussed how to approach joint meetings with the Commons Finance Committee. The Committee agreed that it would be best to meet before the joint meeting in order to identify the issues that the Committee would like to share. It was also suggested

that the Committee may wish to produce a paper for the Commons Finance Committee in advance of meeting.

The Committee agreed the proposed changes in the Committee Operating Framework.

**To Discuss: Forward Work Programme F/23-24/17 UNRESTRICTED**

The Committee was provided with an overview of upcoming business.

The Chair highlighted that he would be having a meeting with the Committee secretariat and Director of Finance to discuss future meeting dates which would be scheduled around the work of the Committee. The future meeting dates for the 2023-24 financial year would return to the Committee at the next meeting.

The Committee asked to be fully informed on the delays to the Victoria Tower project, including cost implications. There would be a discussion on the delays to the Victoria Tower project at the next meeting, once the ongoing procurement review had been completed.

The Committee noted that there no delays to the Peers' Entrance works, which were on track to be completed in the autumn.

The Finance Committee took note of the paper.

**Any other business**

The Committee would next meet on Tuesday 12 March at 12.30pm.

Following the closure of the formal meeting and introductory session was provided by staff from the Finance Department, Enterprise Portfolio Management Office and Parliamentary Commercial Directorate.

Lola Martin  
Governance Support Officer

Emma Burke  
Clerk

[HLFinanceCommittee@parliament.uk](mailto:HLFinanceCommittee@parliament.uk)