



SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes

Thursday 29 February at 12.15pm in Committee Room 3A and on Microsoft Teams

Present:

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Chair)
Lord Faulkner of Worcester
Lord Hogan-Howe
Lord Howard of Rising
Baroness Hussein-Ece
Earl Kinnoull
Baroness Stedman Scott
Baroness Wheeler
Baroness Williams of Trafford

Together with the Clerk of the Parliaments.

Andy Helliwell (Chief Operating Officer) Fehintola Akinlose (Director of Finance and Commercial) and Mathew Chandler (Director of Estates and Facilities) were also in attendance. Ed Connell (Survey Interface Manager, R&R Delivery Authority) and James Young (Programme and Assurance Director, R&R Client Team) attended for item 5. Justin Hills (Deputy Director of Estates and Facilities) and Elle Smith (Assistant Director, Strategic Estates) attended for item 6.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Lord Stoneham of Droxford.

2. Minutes of the 3rd meeting, and matters arising

The Committee agreed the minutes of the previous meeting.

The Chair welcomed Lord Faulkner of Worcester, Lord Hogan-Howe, and Baroness Stedman Scott to the Committee as new members.

The Committee noted that an example of the potential new furniture for the Bishops' Bar had been ordered, and in a few weeks would be trialled in the Bar. If the new furniture was not suitable, the current chairs would be reupholstered.

The Committee asked for an interim update on the changes to the Bishops' Bar before the full review of the changes in July.

3. For Information: Notices from the Chair S/23-24/19 RESTRICTED: MANAGEMENT

The Committee received updates on Fire Safety Training; the Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Services recruitment; heating and cooling systems on the Parliamentary estate; double glazing in Old Palace Yard; the Digital User Group; and advice on reporting maintenance issues.

The Committee noted that Fire Safety Training figures would be sent by email in future, so that the information could be shared as soon as it was available, but that members would be able to raise issues by exception under future Chair's Notices. The Committee noted that it would continue to receive quarterly update papers.

The Committee also noted that the Senior Deputy Speaker had plans to raise the issue of fire safety in the Chairs' Forum, to confirm that all Committee Chairs and Clerks are aware of the action required in the case of a fire alarm.

The Committee discussed other ways of sharing fire safety communications with members. The Committee proposed a stall in Royal Gallery to facilitate members undertaking their fire safety training. The Committee also emphasised the importance of ensuring that there were basic fire safety instructions in every office.

The Clerk of the Parliaments thanked the Committee for their continued focus on fire safety. He highlighted that although, unlike staff, members were under no legal duty to complete the training, it was important they do so for the safety of all those on the estate.

The Committee was informed that the Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service (PHWS) User Group met on Monday 26 February, co-chaired by Jessica Morden MP and Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall. The group undertook a horizon scanning exercise and would be expected to meet every 6 months. The PHWS serves 10,000 people across Parliament.

The Committee asked for more information on the plans for PHWS the role of the new Advanced Nurse Practitioner and any resulting changes to the service.

The Committee inquired about the works to windows in Old Palace Yard and asked whether consideration had been given to using double glazing where the full window required replacement. The Director of Facilities and Estates would return to the Committee with an update.

The Committee took note of the updates and noted its thanks to Lord Clement Jones and the Parliamentary Digital Service Member Support team for the Digital User Group Report.

4. For Information: Switchboard and Telephony System Updates

The Director of Facilities and Estates provided the Committee with an update on Telephony and the Switchboard.

For the past decade, Parliament had outsourced the Switchboard service to Capita. The Switchboard Project would now look for a solution which is future-proofed and value for money. The Committee noted that there would be a make or buy assessment with the Cabinet Office, which would determine whether insourcing or outsourcing offered the best service for Parliament. The new model would include additional features such as a members' inquiry line.

The Committee highlighted the importance of Switchboard staff being able to screen callers in order to prevent threatening calls to members and asked that there were mitigating actions in the interim before the new system with added protections was set up.

The outcome of the make or buy assessment would come to the Services Committee in June. The new Switchboard model was expected to be in place by Summer 2025.

The Committee noted that the procurement of the new telephony system was underway and that the contract for the new system would be awarded in April. The new system would not require new handsets, it would be integrated with Microsoft Teams, and would only require a one-time log in; unlike the current system which required a log in every 90 days. The roll-out of the system was expected to take place this summer. For more information the Director of Facilities encouraged members to get in touch with the Parliamentary Digital Service **REDACTED**.

The Director of Facilities would provide the Committee with further information on the cost of implementation of both the Switchboard and Telephony projects at the next meeting.

The Committee supported the progress that had been made on the Telephony project and took note of the verbal updates.

5. For Discussion: Restoration and Renewal (R&R) – River Terrace Borehole Surveys (Summer 2024)

The Committee discussed the impacts of the Borehole Surveys on the River Terrace over Summer Recess. The Borehole would be 300 millimetres wide and 150ft deep to better understand the makeup of the land below the Palace in preparation for the mechanical and electrical services that would be needed for R&R. The information from the surveys would be shared with R&R and Strategic Estates. There would be more work to look into where exactly the boreholes would be needed, to seek planning approval, and to talk to the Catering and Events team about impacts on them. The Committee noted that plans had not yet been finalised and it was possible that the surveys could take place during a different recess.

The Committee discussed the disruption and noise impact. The noise that would be heard and vibrations felt at the perimeter of the works would be akin to a domestic washing machine. It was not anticipated that noise or vibrations would have a significant impact inside the buildings. The surveys would not take place during sitting times, and if the works were delayed and unable to be completed before the return of the House, they would be stopped, made good and then restarted during the next possible recess. The time of packing up equipment would also be a consideration for timelines.

The Committee asked about mitigations if there was an archaeological find during the dig. The timing and the importance of the discovery would impact the disruption caused. However, there would be archaeologists from the Museum of London Archaeology present throughout the dig in order to help assess any findings.

The Committee noted the proposals by the R&R Programme to carry out a borehole survey on the River Terrace during summer recess 2024.

6. For Discussion: Improving Mobile and Wi-Fi coverage across the Parliamentary Estate

The Committee was provided with an update on the Network & Wireless (Wi-Fi) project and the Emergency Services Network project, specifically the level of impact that works may have on members and their offices. There had been good progress on the project over Summer and Conference recess around the Commons areas of the Palace.

The Committee noted that the next stage would require surveys at varying levels of intrusiveness, requiring some member offices to be entered three times. In the first instance, there would be visual surveys of members offices, which the Committee previously agreed could take place during Mondays and Tuesdays from 9 to 11am. Depending on the outcomes of the visual surveys, there would then be Intrusive Surveys and Main Works outside sitting hours, overnight and during recesses. The more intrusive works would remain flexible and would not impact the business of the House. The Department of Facilities would directly engage with those whose offices would be impacted. Once the team had the list of members it would be shared with the Accommodation Whips.

The Committee noted that both the Wi-Fi project and the ESN works were being delivered together as they would both required access and works in the same locations. The ESN project was required in response to the decision by the Home Office to replace the Airwave system currently used by the emergency services. The Committee was informed that although the decision to complete the works had been outside the control of Parliament, it would be Parliament who paid for the works not the Home Office due to the long-standing convention that it is Parliament who agrees the money available to government. The Committee also emphasised the tight deadline of 2026. The project team responded that the project was on track with the timeline outlined in the full business case.

It was confirmed to the Committee that the new Wi-Fi network rollout would take place in March. Two new networks would be launched; one for members and one for guests. Members using personal devices to join the new member network would have to register devices on their first use. The new guest Wi-Fi would be available at the same time but would not require full registration of a device as access to the guest Wi-Fi would only last for the duration of any one visit. There would be an extensive communications plan in place and drop-in sessions to help members register devices. The Committee suggested that members be given the opportunity to try and register themselves and asked for more information about the intended communications. The Head of Members Services would share more information with the Committee at the next meeting.

The Committee took note of the impact the work may have on members and the communication activities that were proposed, considering the key benefits the overall works would deliver.

7. Forward work programme

The Committee took note of the Forward Work Programme.

8. Any Other Business

An issue was raised on access to food once the House had risen. The Director of Facilities agreed to look into the incident and confirmed that both the Long Room and Bishops' Bar would remain open with food available until 30 minutes after the House had risen for the late sittings the following week.

The Committee suggested that they meet 15 minutes later to avoid a clash with the Deputy Speakers meeting. The Clerk would take this away.

The Director of Facilities encouraged members to visit the Lifestyle Health Kiosk in Millbank House, which had been set up for the week.

The next meeting would be on Thursday 21 March in Committee Room 3A. Details of the timing would be confirmed in due course.

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

Lola Martin
Governance Support Officer

Emma Burke
Clerk

HLServicesCommittee@parliament.uk