

## **Memorandum to the Modernisation Committee**

### **Overview**

1. On 25 July, the House of Commons approved a motion to establish a new Modernisation Committee tasked with reforming House of Commons procedures, driving up standards and improving working practices.
2. Now that the members of the Modernisation Committee have been appointed, I intend, as the Chair, to invite all members of the Committee to agree on a set of core principles that will underpin how the Committee will conduct its work.
3. I have also included in this memorandum suggested priority work streams to be taken forward in the short term alongside some key strategic aims for the Modernisation Committee to consider as it shapes its programme of work across the whole Parliament. At a high level, these are:
  - a. driving up standards;
  - b. improving culture and working practices; and
  - c. reforming working procedures to make the House of Commons more effective.
4. At the first meeting of the Modernisation Committee, I propose that the Committee is asked to discuss and agree these aims and principles so work can commence on the basis of consensus. It will be for the Committee as a whole to develop the policy programme and identify the key priorities that the Committee should work on.

### **Key principles and ways of working**

5. Embodying a politics of service must begin in Parliament. Each individual member of Parliament has a responsibility to embody the high standards expected of public office holders and contribute towards improving the practices and culture of the House of Commons.
6. The Government is committed to working with the House of Commons to achieve this and believes that a set of shared values and principles should inform the Modernisation Committee's approach. I have included below a suggested set of principles as a starting point for discussion when the

Committee meets. These principles will inform the work of the Committee across the Parliament and will guide its deliberations once its early priorities have been considered.

### *Collaborative*

7. The Modernisation Committee will work on a cross-party basis, seeking to build consensus for any reforms and bring the House together by consulting widely on ways to achieve the strategic aims. Where necessary, proposals will be taken forward where a majority of the Committee agrees but consensus will always be sought.
8. The Committee will draw on the perspectives of members from across the House, providing a meaningful route for the smaller parties in the Commons to engage with the Committee and feed in their views.
9. The Committee will also engage with the wider parliamentary community, including house staff and members' staff. This will include drawing on the work of existing Committees, and where appropriate, these Committees will be invited to consider the detail of the core priorities agreed by the Modernisation Committee and produce recommendations. The Modernisation Committee will also seek the advice of relevant office holders in the House of Commons, including the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

### *Transparent*

10. The Modernisation Committee will be open and transparent in its work, publishing its proposed programme of work, the evidence considered and its conclusions, in line with the approach taken by other Committees, so that it is clear on what basis a change is being recommended to the House.

### *Delivery focused*

11. The Modernisation Committee will endeavour to bring recommendations to the House swiftly, responding to the views of members and highlighting the work and recommendations of other relevant Committees. The Modernisation Committee will drive forward long term change as well as acting quickly and decisively when an issue requires a swift response.

## *Strategic*

12. The Modernisation Committee will develop a clear programme of work across the Parliament, working to address entrenched and complex issues. The Modernisation Committee will work on a collegiate basis to identify shared strategic priorities. All members of the Modernisation Committee will have the opportunity to feed in suggestions to shape the work of the Modernisation Committee and we will carefully consider issues raised by members from across the House.
13. The Modernisation Committee will keep the House updated on its work and ensure that there are opportunities for all members of the parliamentary community (including House and members' staff) to feed in their views.

## **Strategic Aims**

### ***Driving up standards***

14. Members across the House will know that the events of recent years and the misconduct of individual members has eroded public trust and confidence in this institution. It is incumbent on all of us to embody the high standards that the public expect of us and we must all act to change and improve the reputation of this place.
15. The diligence of the Committee on Standards and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards over the years has been instrumental in promoting good conduct amongst members, as has the work of the Independent Expert Panel and Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme. Last May's review of the standards landscape, concluded by the predecessor Committee on Standards, provides a foundation on which to take forward further reforms of the current standards system, and the Modernisation Committee will wish to refer to that report as it works with the Committee on Standards to address existing shortfalls in the system.
16. The tightening of the rules on second jobs for members of the Commons, which was agreed by the House on 25 July and which will take effect on 25 October, was a first step towards meaningful change of the system. It is now for the Modernisation Committee to build on this foundation.

### *Suggested initial priorities*

17. In particular, the Modernisation Committee should maintain the focus on the role of paid advice in members' professional lives. It should consider what advantages, if any, outside paid engagements such as media appearances, journalism and speeches furnish to the public, versus the potential conflicts of interest and attention that arise from such paid endeavours. The Modernisation Committee will wish to consult closely with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, who is best placed to advise on the practicability of any further changes to the rules governing members' outside interests.
18. The Committee will appreciate that second jobs are not the only area of concern with regards to the public's trust in its representatives. Turning the page on unacceptable and damaging high profile incidents of bullying, harassment and abuse we have seen in Parliament in recent years remains a top priority.
19. As above, since its introduction in July 2018, the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) has become an important part of driving cultural change in Parliament, but there remains more to be done to improve the system as a whole.
20. We all have a responsibility to each other as members of the parliamentary community and the Modernisation Committee has a unique opportunity in this regard. The Committee should bring together extant work on the various support services in the House – including the third review of the ICGS – and advise on the implementation of their respective recommendations, considering what gaps across the system there are left to address.
21. A key priority would be to seek to join up all relevant actors, including the political parties, to ensure members and all those who access Parliament feel safe and supported. Paul Kernaghan's recommendation that complaints made to political parties should be brought into the scope of the ICGS is a key example of how this join-up can be accomplished, and the Committee should work closely with the Director of the ICGS, the Commissions and the Independent Expert Panel as it seeks to drive up the behavioural standards of this place.

### ***Improving culture and working practices***

22. This is the most diverse Parliament in history and we have a responsibility to consider whether further changes are needed to address cultural issues of bullying and harassment and sexual harassment; to make this place more compatible with family life. These are important issues to consider and address if we are to make the House of Commons representative of society and an attractive place of work for future generations.
23. The Modernisation Committee will work to ensure that the House of Commons is an organisation that looks open and accessible to people from all walks of life so the House of Commons is representative of the society which we serve. Diversity and an inclusive working environment is of vital importance for members, staff and the wider parliamentary community alike.
24. The Modernisation Committee will support the initiatives being taken forward by the House Authorities, including the work previously undertaken by the Women and Equalities Committee on creating a more 'gender-sensitive Parliament', to make the House of Commons an accessible and inclusive place of work.
25. The Committee will engage with the Procedure Committee to consider whether there is support to build on recent reforms, including reforms to the proxy voting procedures.
26. The Modernisation Committee will work with the Women and Equalities Committee, the Procedure Committee, the ICGS and the House of Commons Commission to consider these issues in the round to make the House of Commons a place we can be proud to call the home of parliamentary democracy.

### ***Reforming procedures***

27. The scrutiny of government business is one of Parliament's core functions. I want to ensure that members are able to perform this function as effectively as possible, whilst ensuring backbench voices raising wider policy issues and local causes remain a prominent part of business.
28. There have been concerns inside and outside Parliament that backbench business in the Chamber has not been used as well as it could be. When the

number of speakers is fewer than those who have called for a debate or a debate is undersubscribed, they can end early, meaning the House of Commons adjourns sooner than it otherwise would.

29. Given the government's extensive legislative programme, as set out in the King's Speech, I am committed to treating parliamentary time as the precious resource that it is. This means placing a greater emphasis on members scrutinising government legislation going forwards.

#### *Suggested initial priorities*

30. I therefore propose that the Modernisation Committee works with the Procedure Committee, the Backbench Business Committee and the Petitions Committee to consider how time and resources can most effectively be allocated to the different forms of backbench business, including debates, private members' bills and petitions. The Modernisation Committee's recommendations should balance the importance of making time available for non-government matters alongside the exigencies of government business and the need to progress with scrutiny of the government's legislative programme.

31. A renewed emphasis on scrutiny of government legislation, as well as on the quality of responses to parliamentary questions, will provide members on all benches with the opportunity to consider issues of national importance and of concern to their constituents. On top of the training offer that the House of Commons provides to members new and old, the Modernisation Committee should deliberate on how members can be better supported to scrutinise the Government programme meaningfully and effectively.

32. The Modernisation Committee will also invite members to offer suggestions on how the procedures and working practices of the House could be changed to support these priorities.