

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Note of discussion for the meeting held on 14 September 2020 at 4.30pm

[Meeting held over Microsoft Teams as a videoconference]

Members present:

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair)

Michael Fabricant
Marion Fellows
Colleen Fletcher

Sir Greg Knight
Mrs Pauline Latham
Giles Watling

Apologies: Jessica Morden and Mark Tami

1. Informal Note

The Committee agreed the informal note of the meeting on 7 September 2020.

Matters arising

Lords Services Committee

The Chair reported that he had held the first of his monthly catch-up meetings with Lord Laming, Chair of the Lords Services Committee, his counterpart in the Lords.

2. Catering Services update

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

Mr Tapner-Evans provided an update on the performance of Catering Services in the 2019/20 financial year and set out the key objectives for 2020/21. Much had been done in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including enhanced safety measures such as clearer signage, increased cleaning regimes and better management of the flow and layout of catering venues. He welcomed the Committee's views on the catering priorities for the year ahead.

The following points were then discussed:

Cashless catering

The Chair expressed concern at the proposal for Catering Services to continue providing a solely cashless service, even after the pandemic. Another Member supported this view. Mr Tapner-Evans said that prior to the pandemic, 65 percent of catering transactions were cashless, but accepted the feedback. He added that few comments had been received on the move to a cashless service.

Dietary requirements

The Chair recognised the efforts to provide more vegan and vegetarian food options on menus. Mr Tapner-Evans said that the catering team aimed to offer a breadth of choice and noted that there was a growing national trend towards veganism and vegetarianism,

reflected in the efforts to provide more of these food options on the Estate. The expanded range of dishes had been introduced following feedback from the previous Committee.

A Member asked what was being done to improve the range of food options for those with dietary requirements. Mr Tapner-Evans said that gluten-free food options were available on a daily basis, though he would feed back the points raised to his team and ensure that the hot food options for those with dietary needs were better advertised. A menu tracker could be accessed on the catering pages on the intranet to identify where the various meal options were served.

Halal and kosher food options

A Member asked whether the catering team was confident that food could be prepared and served in adherence to halal and kosher standards. Mr Tapner-Evans said that several food suppliers had been identified that could meet both requirements. Kosher meals would be pre-prepared and sealed by the supplier to avoid any contamination by crockery or cutlery. These products were being tested by the catering team before they were launched in catering venues, and Parliament's Workplace Equality Networks had been consulted on the proposals.

Members' Dining and Smoking Room

Mr Tapner-Evans said that the proposal to change opening hours was to reflect potential future changes to the sitting rhythms of the House and to ensure that catering staff were being utilised in venues where they were needed. He was happy to keep this under constant review. The Chair said that he supported looking at opening hours to better reflect the rhythm of the House.

The Chair thanked Mr Tapner-Evans for his leadership and the catering team for their work.

Decision

The Committee:

- **endorsed** the continuation of the trial period of previously agreed initiatives to be reviewed in January 2021;
- **noted** the performance of Catering Services in 2019/20;
- **agreed** that the update should become an annual one; and
- **expressed** strong views against a move to totally cashless service, but remained open to discussing changes to opening and closing times for certain venues.

3. Update on Press Gallery and Lobby facilities

The Committee noted the paper prepared by Alasdair Rendall, Head of Media, Commons Communications Office, listing the progress made on several issues raised by representatives of the Press Gallery and Lobby in relating to their accommodation and facilities in the Palace when they appeared before the Committee in June. The Chair commended the progress that had been made and asked that representatives from the Press Gallery and Lobby be invited to a future meeting to update the Committee.

Decision

The Committee **noted** the list and the work that had been completed to date with a view to revisiting it early in 2021 when a further update on progress would be received.

4. Travel Office out-of-hours helpline

Marion Fellows, Chair of the Travel Office Consumer Panel, briefed the Committee.

Mrs Fellows provided an update on the work of the Travel Office Consumer Panel. She sought the Committee's views on the provision of an out-of-hours telephone helpline provided by CTM. It was proposed that the routine helpline, open during office hours, might be disaggregated by having its opening times extended.

Decision

The Committee:

- **confirmed** the Committee's relationship with the Travel Office Consumer Panel, where the Panel's Chair provided routine updates to the Committee and made recommendations on the operation of travel services for the endorsement of the Committee; and
- **endorsed** the approach to the re-procurement exercise to seek to disaggregate the normal hours line from the emergency line, with longer hours for the normal line.

5. Upper Waiting Hall exhibitions

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee.

Owing to the 2019 General Election and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Upper Waiting Hall exhibitions scheduled for the autumn and spring periods had been postponed indefinitely while new applications had continued to be received until March. Given that social-distancing measures remained in place and that footfall on the Estate remained low, it was proposed that exhibitions should continue to be put on hold until the spring of 2021, when the exhibitions postponed from previous autumn and spring periods may be able to go ahead.

Decision

The Committee **agreed**:

- to postpone Upper Waiting Hall exhibitions until the spring of 2021;
- that the next ballot (for the autumn period next year) should be held at the end of June 2021; and
- to stop accepting new applications for exhibitions until the spring of 2021.

The Committee will next meet on 28 September at 3.30pm.