



Modernisation Committee

HOUSE OF COMMONS LONDON SW1A 0AA
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From the Chair, Rt Hon Lucy Powell MP

Marianne Cwynarski CBE
Director General, House of Commons

22 April 2025

Dear Marianne,

On 1 April the Modernisation Committee held an evidence session with current and former MPs, as part of the committee's inquiry into the accessibility of the House of Commons and its procedures. The panel of witnesses candidly shared their experiences of being disabled and MPs, and the various obstacles and issues they had encountered. They also highlighted areas of good practice, and teams which had been especially supportive, such as the Doorkeeper team and Whips' offices. There are of course physical limitations due to the Parliamentary estate which can only be addressed by the Restoration and Renewal programme, and so our inquiry will not seek to consider matters relating to this. However, it was clear that the challenges facing disabled MPs and others are multi-dimensional, and that efforts to solve these will involve many stakeholders. We hope to get a better understanding of these issues and possible ways of addressing them as we progress through the inquiry, and we are grateful to you and your team for your continued cooperation.

During our session on 1 April, there were however some issues which we wanted to raise with you ahead of the conclusion of our work later in the year. These include:

- Could you investigate whether heavy doors which do not require a pass reader for entry (like the doors to the House of Commons library, for example), and cannot be replaced or equipped with an electronic door opening mechanism could be propped open as standard practice? This would allow colleagues better access and not require them to ask for assistance. If this makes a space draftier as a result, portable heaters could be employed, as accessibility is a key priority.
- There is a distinct lack of accessible toilets around the chamber. Could your team investigate the prospect of putting in more accessible toilets, and provide us with a timeline for actioning this?
- Toilets and lifts on the estate are often out of order. Could your team let us know why that is, and what action is being taken to ensure that any issues are resolved quickly to prevent disruption to MPs and other users of the parliamentary estate?

- Inadequate lighting was raised by MPs as a particular issue, both inside, in corridors and committee rooms, as well as outside for example in the colonnades by New Palace Yard. Please could you review this, and see whether lightbulbs could be replaced/added to ensure the estate is made more accessible?
- Glass doors with grey/frosted markings are a particular issue for visually impaired colleagues. Could your team investigate whether more colourful markings could be added to them?
- Colourful markings on escalators/steps and height differences in the floor would also help to make the estate more accessible.
- Turnstile doors to get into the building were highlighted as being particularly difficult for disabled colleagues. Mindful of the security considerations, what can be done to make accessing the building itself more straightforward?
- Could your team look to add audio indicators and Braille in the lifts?
- Signage was another issue raised during the session, and which was raised by colleagues in our anonymous form. Could you update us on the organisation's efforts to ensure there is proper and accessible signage, in a sufficiently large font, on the estate to assist MPs, the public and staff? For example, the signs on committee rooms in Committee Corridor were highlighted as being particularly hard to spot.
- We understand that self-service style catering saves time and staff resource, but it is not accessible. Could you commit to investigating how catering outlets such as the Despatch Box could encourage their staff to take an inclusive approach, offering to pour milk for example, to better assist customers who may not be able to do so themselves? It might also be helpful to offer practical guidance on diversity and inclusion in the context of their specific roles to ensure all MPs, staff, public and others who use our catering venues feel like they have been met with respect and professionalism.
- We heard that annunciators are often placed high up on the wall, and that a lower placement and larger font size text would make them more accessible. Please could you investigate and report back on what action is being taken?

We are very grateful for you taking the time to consider our letter, and we look forward to your response. We would be grateful if you could provide a response by the 30 May. Please contact the clerks of the committee if you require any clarification and we will continue to keep you updated as further issues come to light.

Kind regards,

*Yours,
Lucy*

RT HON LUCY POWELL MP