

MINUTES

R&R Client Board

Meeting date	Monday 8 December 2025
Meeting location	Committee Room 4A
Meeting time	16:30–18:00

Attendees

Client Board	Programme Board (in attendance)
Rachel Blake MP	Lord Vaux of Harrowden
Simon Burton	
Sir Alan Campbell MP	Officials
Judith Cummins MP (Chair, for Mr Speaker)	Chris Dawson (Client Team)
Marianne Cwynarski	Chris Elliott (Commons)
Irene Campbell MP (delegate for Steve Barclay)	Elizabeth Hunt (Client Team)
Marie Goldman MP	Kate Long (Lords)
Tom Goldsmith	Alasdair Love (Lords)
Andy Helliwell	Chloe Mawson (Lords)
Mr Shrinivas Honap	Russ MacMillan (Delivery Authority)
The Earl of Kinnoull	Lloyd Owen (Commons)
Dr Alice Maynard	Ed Potton (Commons)
Lord McFall of Alcluith (Chair)	Charlotte Simmonds (Client Team)
Lord McLoughlin	Jenni Singleton (Client Team)
Charlotte Moar	Matt White (Delivery Authority)
Lord Morse	James Young (Client Team)
Jesse Norman MP	Michael Torrance (Lords)
Baroness Pitkeathley	Michael Berry (Lords)
Lord Purvis of Tweed	Jack Holden (Client Team)
Baroness Scott of Needham Market	Danielle Nash (Cabinet Office)
Baroness Smith of Basildon	Abi Samuels (Commons)
Nick Smith MP	Michael Winders (Lords)
Lord True	
Catherine Ward	

1. Welcome and standing items

Judith Cummins MP chaired the meeting.

The Client Board agreed the minutes of its last meeting.

The R&R Client Board agreed the minutes of its meeting on 25 November 2025, and that they be published.

2. Costed proposals

The Client Board agreed to consider amendments to, and agreement of, the costed proposals report and then consider engagement plans subsequently.

The Client Team (CT) outlined the changes that had been undertaken since the meeting on 24 November, and that an amendment paper was circulated, along with a letter from Jesse Norman MP.

Jesse Norman MP outlined the reason for his letter and his intention to register his concern with the approach of taking options off the table at this stage of the process. The Client Board discussed the approach of attaching the letter to the minutes, and asked that it was clear it represented the views of an individual Member.

The Client Board agreed to publish the letter alongside the minutes, and that the minutes should be published at the same time as the report if agreed.

The Client Board agreed the proposed amendments and during the discussion raised:

- An amendment to strengthen the wording in support of down selection was agreed but not supported by Jesse Norman MP.
- A Member suggested additional wording was required on the calculation underpinning the proposed financial commitment of up to £3bn over seven years for the phase one works, as individual project costs listed in the report for work in the seven-year period did not match this total. The CT said some work which commenced during the phase one works, and which would be funded through the proposed financial commitment, would not be completed during the seven years owing to the sequencing of the works. An allowance had been made for the cost of items which were still going through formal approval or design stages, for risk and opportunities. The Client Board supported an amendment to the text, to be agreed by the Chairs, that set out expenditure requirements within the £3bn cap would continue to be subject to formal scrutiny.

The Client Board agreed the Costed Proposals report. Jesse Norman MP asked that his objection to the report be noted.

The CT explained that the Client Board has been provided with the planned communications approach and pro-active media plans. The paper proposed a number of products including a two-page joint statement, a version of the report summary and a leaflet on the report. There would also be exhibition stands in places and the proposed products would be revised after the meeting. The CT wanted to understand the scale of approach the Client Board thought appropriate.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- There was support for the proposed approach and it being the first introductory step in a longer programme. It was important the strategy engaged with the media, with key messaging on the importance of the building, and the vision and responsibility that this work was being put forward under;
- The importance of explaining the position on temporary offices and accommodation;
- The timing of the report publication which would be agreed by the Chairs and Leaders of each House after the meeting. Some Members felt there would be benefit if the dates of the debate were known at publication time, others noted the need to allow time for the information to be absorbed and for an outline of a timeline to be available;
- The importance of accessibility and the differences in the communication needs between the Houses, notably that offices were staffed differently;
- That a sense of optimism was important; this was an important step forward and it was important to inform the public about what the Houses were trying to do; messaging should be positive; the work would have value. Polls showed strong public support for

restoration and combined with the strong employment opportunities for skilled workers and economic benefits, the project would provide a sense of national renewal;

- The benefit of quick reference guides and graphics being available on the options;
- The need for clear coverage of all parts of the UK and for programme governance to ensure a clear focus was maintained on R&R rather than other estates projects;
- Assurance that Client Board Members would continue to be engaged in the development of the communications strategy, and that Members were willing to meet again if needed;
- That the final communication strategy and products be agreed by the Chairs and Leaders of each House.

The R&R Client Board:

- **Agreed the text of the revised draft costed proposals report. Jesse Norman noted his objection.**
 - **Agreed to publish these minutes alongside the report, with the letter from Jesse Norman MP appended.**
 - **Provided feedback on suggested key messaging and agreed planned engagement and communications activities to support costed proposals publication, subject to further work by the Client Team.**
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3. Any other business and date of next meeting

A Client Board member noted the current governance structure had been set up quickly and asked whether it would be subject to any review. The CT confirmed this would be a matter the Board would discuss in 2026.

The next meeting would be on 2 March 2026.



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Lord McFall of Alcluith
Judith Cummins MP
Chairs, R&R Client Board

5th December 2025

Dear John and Judith

Re: Restoration and Renewal Costed Proposals Report

I am writing to express concerns about the current state of affairs with the Restoration and Renewal (“R&R”) Client Board and the Costed Proposals Report.

As you will know well, extensive work has been done on R&R over more than a decade by successive teams across both Houses, including Strategic Estates, the Delivery Authority, and the Programme and Client Boards. The volume of technical, architectural, engineering and financial material developed to date, culminating in this latest set of proposals, runs to thousands of pages.

I do not doubt that this work has been conducted with the best of intentions, and nothing here should be construed as criticism of any individual(s). I am also keenly aware that, having joined the House of Commons Commission little more than a year ago, I am a lot less knowledgeable about this project than many members of the Client Board.

But, viewing matters as a whole, I feel obliged to set out for the record several serious concerns that I have, about both the procedure that has been followed and the conclusions reached in the Report.

Public Awareness

Overall, I should say that specific awareness of R&R, both among the general public and among members of both Houses, is rather low. The internal bodies concerned, including the Programme Board, the Client Board, the two Commissions and the Commons Finance Committee, meet in private; and their decisions, including spending decisions, are subject to relatively low levels of public scrutiny before they are implemented.

Process

Hundreds of millions of pounds are authorised and expended on this basis every year. In relation to R&R, however, the Houses are now to be asked to authorise up to £3 billion (the costs cited here do not include VAT or inflation) in spending over the next seven years. This authorisation will come through a simple vote in each House on a motion shortly after publication of the Costed Proposals Report, with publication of the Report expected before Christmas and the votes likely to be early in the New Year.



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The Report itself, one should note, is a long, complex and in places technical document. It will not only be hard for anyone not already familiar with these issues to understand, but is also likely to be resistant to easy summary.

I do not regard this speed and lack of scrutiny as in any way acceptable. If in the parallel case this was ordinary public expenditure undertaken by government, there would be a detailed and sequenced process of scrutiny and justification, including ministers being held to account at the dispatch box, and perhaps ministers and officials being required to appear before committees before any decision was taken. Moreover, those ministers would be acting under executive authority democratically conferred in the usual way. None of these things is true in relation to the present process.

Control

But this issue raises another one. Who is in charge of this process? You are both the Chairs, and before Judith took her place, the previous Chair was the Speaker of the Commons; and these actions have been presented in your names. But I can see no real evidence of the active guiding hand or hands of any Parliamentarian behind the process. That too is a serious concern.

Cost and Impact

All this would be problematic enough if the levels of planned expenditure were small, and limited in scope and duration. But in fact the opposite is true. The expenditure forecasts are enormous, with a currently projected minimum cost of £11 billion to £19 billion. They will affect not just the whole of the Palace of Westminster, a globally iconic building, but the whole of the functioning of Parliament. And even on the shortest possible projected timetable, they will last up to 24 years, with the House of Commons vacated for up to 10 years and the Lords for up to 15 years.

Means of Delivery

Much of the recent experience of procuring major and even minor works – including on the Victoria Tower and on the front entrance to the House of Lords – has been one of botched procedure, delay, cost increases and faulty specification.

The longer historical record is also not encouraging. Portcullis House, completed in 2001, was seen as very expensive at its completion, running more than 40% over budget; many people would, I think, say that the building was greatly over-specified at the outset. Yet even so it is now experiencing serious problems less than twenty-five years later. These include its insufficient office capacity, its leaky atrium roof, and its faulty heating and sanitation systems. A large number of its doors were clearly disability-unfriendly even at the time they were installed.

In the case of R&R, the Costed Proposals Report itself acknowledges inflationary drift, design immaturity and significant uncertainty as likely to affect phasing and delivery of the project. The costings of the two preferred options, “full decant” and “EMI+”, have been worked out by different teams, the Delivery Authority and Strategic Estates respectively. Delivery of R&R will



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also have to take place alongside implementation of the existing Strategic Estates programme, creating further complexity.

As regards governance, the Report recommends, remarkably, that “work be undertaken... on the roles and responsibilities of the different teams [*sic*] working on R&R and governance structures” – but only after phase one has been voted through. No less remarkably, it also scouts the idea of expanding the current Client and Programme Boards to a three-board structure with the addition of a new “R&R Board”, the whole thing reporting to the Commissions of the two Houses. It is not hard to see how this could increase bureaucracy, delay, dispersion of responsibility and confusion.

None of this inspires confidence, either in the current projections or in the two Houses' ability to ensure effective project or cost management.

Option Comparability

The Costed Proposals Report presents the Houses with a vote on phase one preparatory works, and frames an underlying choice between two preferred options, full decant and EMI+. It also rejects two other options, “Continued Presence” and “EMI”. To support all this, it offers an array of arguments using cost-benefit analysis to compare the options, and to reject some of them, on the grounds of projected cost and for technical reasons.

This emphasis on comparability is entirely understandable; but I believe it is also misleading. Just to focus on the two options preferred: the EMI+ option would treat the Palace of Westminster as akin to the Forth Bridge, which is supposedly always being repainted. That is, there would always be some maintenance and re-fit going on in the Palace, perhaps a lot of it at times, but the location and the essential continuity of the institution would be maintained.

In contrast to EMI+, the full decant option would entail the complete removal of Parliament from the Palace of Westminster for more than a decade. That would mark a breach in its continuous occupation of that location over many centuries. It would also sharply curtail public access to the Palace for a prolonged period. There is an obvious but unquantifiable risk, not fully addressable by legislation, that having moved out, the Houses might for some reason never move back in. The size of the galleries would be more than halved. There would be little or no scope for current ceremonial events such as the state opening of Parliament, periods of lying-in-state and joint addresses to both Houses.

These considerations fly in the face of the history and traditions of the Palace, and they may well adversely affect the basic authority and legitimacy of Parliament. They are markedly different in kind from the operational and scheduling implications discussed in the Report, and they cannot be assessed using cost-benefit analysis. This means that the two preferred options are not readily comparable, and cannot be reviewed against one another simply on a financial or technical basis. It is a case of apples and oranges.

There may be evidence that presenting four options neutrally is unhelpful and confusing. But I have not seen any; and I do not accept the suggestion that Members of either House are incapable



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of making reasoned decisions on the merits of three options, or even four. Effectively ruling out some options in advance in order to avoid unnecessary future costs is not unwise, but it is a decision that should be made not by the Client Board on the basis of technical advice, but by Parliamentarians on an all-things-considered basis.

Public Reaction

The effect of all this is not hard to summarise. The Costed Proposals Report is scheduled to be published before Christmas or early in the New Year. It will present phase one preparatory works, themselves costing up to £3 billion over seven years, to Parliamentarians, and by extension to the general public. And it will present an underlying choice between two preferred options now estimated to cost a minimum of £11 billion to £19 billion.

These numbers are, I would suggest, an order of magnitude higher than any current public expectation. The preferred options will inevitably be viewed in political as well as other terms, and perhaps in the light of the recent tax-raising Budget. The process that has been followed, and the press relating to recent procurements by the Houses, are unlikely to increase public confidence. The Client Board's intention to have votes early in the New Year may also create the impression that the Houses are being rushed into a decision. All in all, the result could be a disastrously adverse public and political reaction, not merely against the R&R project, but against the institution of Parliament itself.

For these reasons, I am afraid I cannot support the Report, and I would be grateful if these concerns could be added as an appendix to the Minutes, or preferably – for the sake of balance, clarity and transparency – as an annex to the Report itself.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Jesse Norman
Shadow Leader of the House of Commons

Member of Parliament
Hereford and South Herefordshire