House of Commons

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Note of Discussion for the meeting held on 22 February 2021 at 4.30pm

[*Virtual meeting held on Microsoft Teams*]

Members present:

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair)

Michael Fabricant	Mrs Maria Miller
Marion Fellows	Sir Greg Knight
Colleen Fletcher	Mark Tami

Apologies: Mrs Pauline Latham, Jessica Morden and Giles Watling

1. Informal Notes

The Committee **agreed** the informal notes of its meetings held on 18 January, 1 February and 8 February 2021.

2. Fees and charges policy

The Clerk briefed the Committee.

Decision

The Committee **noted** the fees and charges policy.

3. Supply of IT hardware for Members and Members' staff

Guy Drury, Project Manager, Parliamentary Digital Service, briefed the Committee. Rob Sanders, Director of Live Services, Parliamentary Digital Service, was also on the call.

Mr Drury gave a presentation on the change of supplier for IT hardware equipment for Members and their staff. The contract, which was due to expire in March, was being replaced along the same principles as the current one, though a new website would be launched for ordering equipment and PDS was exploring options for the direct invoicing of IT equipment to IPSA. The House was in a strong position with the new provider as the current climate meant that equipment was competitively priced. There were, however, wider issues to consider in the longer term on the House's IT allocation allowance, given that it was set by a previous Committee and included largely outdated requirements such as desktop computers and heavy-duty printers, but also the complexity created by the overlap with other purchase routes such as the IPSA office allowance and private purchase. Equipment could only be paid for through one of these budget routes and could not be crossed over or spread across them which also led to challenges in identifying who owned equipment. He added that a working group was being set up to examine these issues and that PDS would continue to engage with Members and their staff.

The following points were then discussed:

- A Member asked if an emergency replacement service could be provided under the new contract arrangements, particularly at weekends, to speed up the process where IT equipment was urgently required. In a recent incident, a member of their office was unable to do their job for nearly a week while they waited for a replacement computer to be issued and this has caused a great deal of stress for the individual concerned. Mr Sanders took the points on board and said that he would consider how equipment was replaced in urgent situations.

- A Member noted that it was not an ideal time to change supplier with the end of the financial year approaching and sought assurances that this would not lead to any inconvenience for Members or their staff and that equipment purchased through IPSA would be charged to budgets in the correct financial year. Mr Drury said that the alignment of the new system with IPSA budgets and invoicing was a priority issue and it was expected that the new system would be ready before the start of the new financial year.

- A Member emphasised the need for Members to be involved in discussions around the policy and process to ensure that their needs were fully reflected in the provision of IT equipment. It would be useful if Members were able to choose which budget they wanted new equipment to be costed to.

- A Member noted that many Members preferred to use desktop computers rather than laptops and that the hardware catalogue should reflect this by continuing to provide a range of options for different needs. Mr Drury noted the points and said that desktop computers would continue to be available through the catalogue.

Decision

The Committee **noted** the update.

4. Microsoft Teams and telephony update

Steven Mark, Senior Responsible Owner, Microsoft Teams Programme, briefed the Committee.

Mr Mark provided an update on the transition of Members and their staff from Skype for Business to Microsoft Teams telephony software. The transition had been piloted with around a dozen offices to ensure that the migration of Members would be as smooth as possible, while the telephone numbers of a thousand House staff had been migrated onto the new system. Much work had been done around communications and engagement ahead of the transition, particularly in developing guidance for users, so that the migration of Members and their offices could now begin. It was planned to migrate offices all through March at 8am each working day so that issues could be identified and resolved as quickly as possible with the intention that it would be completed by the Easter recess.

The Chair asked whether there were parliamentary account holders still using Skype for Business given that Microsoft Teams had been rolled out across the House the year before. Mr Mark said that all users had access to Microsoft Teams but that the telephony function had not yet been migrated entirely from Skype for Business for all of them and that they would be required to get to grips with the new software.

A Member asked if guidance would be provided for transferring call diverts from existing telephone lines to MS Teams. Mr Mark said that Members would be supported in setting up call diverts.

Decision

The Committee **noted** the update.

5. Any other business

Committee correspondence

The Committee **noted** an introductory letter from domestic news channel GB News, dated 28 January.

The Committee noted a letter from the Senior Deputy Speaker, House of Lords, dated 4 February, and **agreed** an extension of the derogation for the use of a committee room by the Lords hybrid Grand Committee until the summer recess.

The Committee will next meet on Monday 1 March 2021.