House of Commons

ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Note of Discussion for the meeting held on 26 April 2021 at 4.30pm

[*Virtual meeting held on Microsoft Teams*]

Members present:

Sir Charles Walker (in the Chair)

Michael Fabricant
Marion Fellows
Jessica Morden
Mark Tami

Apologies: Colleen Fletcher, Mrs Maria Miller, Pauline Latham, Sir Greg Knight and Giles Watling.

1. Informal Note

The Committee **agreed** the amended informal note of the meeting on 19 April 2021.

2. Commercial catering: Chair's recommendations

The Chair briefed the Committee [Richard Tapner Evans, Director of Catering, also joined the call for this item].

The Chair put forward his draft recommendations on the future of commercial catering for submission to the House of Commons Commission that reflected his discussions with Mr Speaker.

Decision

The Committee **agreed** the recommendations to the Commission.

3. Members' Services and Member Engagement update

This item was deferred to a future meeting.

4. House Service Strategy review and Corporate Business Plan 2021-22

Matthew Hamlyn, Strategic Director, Chamber and Participation Team, and Convenor, Strategy Review Group, and Emily Baldock, Secretary to the Strategy Review Group, briefed the Committee on the light-touch review of the House Service Strategy and the proposed process for developing the next House Service Strategy.

Mr Hamlyn provided an overview of the points covered in the paper emphasising that the aim of the work was to tighten the language used in the Strategy to make the goals more succinct and to ensure that it focused principally on the work of supporting Members and the core business of the House. Another key aim was to improve the way in which the Strategy was developed in future to ensure that there was prior and more effective engagement with Members and other key stakeholders well in advance of its submission to the Commission to better reflect their needs.

The Chair welcomed the tightening of language to create more concise statements of intent and noted that goal one, 'Facilitating effective scrutiny and debate', was particularly good. Mr Hamlyn said that the relationship between Members and their constituents was now better reflected in the Strategy than it had been previously as this had often been neglected. Ms Baldock added that the intention was also to recognise that the House Service also supported Members' staff and those in constituency-based roles who had often felt overlooked in the past.

Malin Eliasson, Director of Financial Management and Performance, then provided an update on the draft Corporate Business Plan 2021-22, the aim of which was to focus on areas for improvement while identifying key activities that were to be maintained.

The Chair noted that the current membership of the House seemed to be more diverse than the House Service in terms of those from different regions of the UK and asked how that might be reflected within the aims of goal 2, 'Creating a diverse and inclusive working environment'. Mr Hamlyn said that he agreed with this view though the House Service had become increasingly diverse in recent years. He recognised that the recruitment of House staff was London-centric though London represented a diverse population from a wider range of nationalities and there were other factors that should also be considered such as socio-economic backgrounds that were not protected under equality legislation. Another key issue was retaining staff once they were employed by the House. Ms Eliasson said that increased flexible working opportunities could be provided to encourage people from across the country to apply to work in the House and that the output and activities in the plan could be updated to provide a stronger focus in this area. The Chair asked if the House's recruitment processes could be reviewed with this in mind and if more could be done to undertake outreach work at universities and in the regions of the UK to attract a more diverse workforce. Mr Hamlyn said that much was already being done to focus on inclusive recruitment and that work was also being undertaken to diversify the workforce not only in terms of protected characteristics but also with education and socio-economic background in mind. He gave the example of the removal of the graduate requirement for the Commons Fast Stream Programme. Ms Eliasson said that she would take forward the points raised with the Inclusive Recruitment Review Team to seek more clarity and focus in this area.

Decision

The Committee:

- **endorsed** the revised House Service strategy and the proposed process for development of the next strategy; and

- noted the draft Corporate Business Plan 2021–22.

5. Stationery rules

The Committee considered this matter.

Decision

The Committee formally **agreed** to the request from the Committee on Standards recommending that responsibility for the rules on stationery be transferred from the Administration Committee to the Committee on Standards.

The Committee will next meet on 17 May 2021 at 4.30pm