



SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes

Thursday 18 November at 1pm in Committee Room G and on Microsoft Teams

Present:

Lord Touhig (Chair)
Lord Ashton of Hyde
Lord Borwick
Lord Clark of Windermere
Lord Clement-Jones
Baroness Deech
Lord Judge
Baroness Morris of Bolton
Lord Stoneham of Droxford
Baroness Wheeler

Together with the Clerk of the Parliaments.

Fehintola Akinlose (Director of Finance and Procurement) and Carl Woodall (Director of Facilities) were also in attendance. Tanya Harris, (Interim Head of Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service) and Dr Paul Grime (Occupational Health Physician) attended for item 5; Debbie McGuire (Parliamentary Travel Office Contract Manager) attended for item 6; Tracey Jessup (Chief Information and Digital Officer) and David Smith (Managing Director of the Parliamentary Digital Service) attended for item 7; and Stephen Perkins (Head of Catering and Retail Service) attended item 8.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting, and matters arising

The Committee agreed the minutes of the 5th meeting.

3. Chair's Notices S/21-22/38 RESTRICTED

The Committee received a number of updates from the Chair. The Committee agreed that clear and quick communications to all members on any agreed change to the fire evacuation policy were required. Further work would be required on any change in policy ahead of the next fire drill if members and staff were to be treated differently based on their risk levels.

Members thanked the Chair for his visit to the Association of Conservative Peers and for listening to the concerns raised.

Lord Clement-Jones thanked the Chair for his support of the Digital User Group and expected to bring a paper to the Committee in due course.

4. Verbal update on Electric Vehicle Chargers and COVID-19

The Clerk of the Parliaments as Accounting Officer, and with the advice of the Finance Director, informed the Committee that the costs of the EVC works previously outlined to the Committee did not demonstrate value for money and should not proceed. The Committee endorsed this position and asked for the Director of Facilities to explore other options to enable members to charge electric vehicles.

It was confirmed that a lessons learned exercise would be conducted on the process and the Restoration and Renewal team would be informed of the interest from members in EVCs whilst they were still working up the requirements.

Verbal debate on Covid control measures

The Clerk of the Parliaments provided an update on the current operation of the estate. The Commission had taken the decision to heighten measures on the estate, following advice from the UKHSA on the number of cases. These measures had proved successful in reducing the number of cases on the estate and had today been reduced. The number of cases is shared with the Commission weekly and would be kept under close and constant review. Members were encouraged to continue to get tested regularly and wear masks in line with guidance issued.

All hospitality guests are required to wear a mask when moving through security checkpoints and around the buildings.

5. Parliamentary Health & Wellbeing Service: 2021 review S/21- 22/39 RESTRICTED

The Committee was updated on the work of the Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service (PHWS) over the last year. The service had provided both remote and hybrid service models during that time. The nurse had returned to the Lower Waiting Hall for pre-booked appointments and the Occupational Health and Counselling services were providing both physical and virtual appointments depending on need.

A successful flu vaccination campaign had taken place in October including considerable take up from the Lords. The Employee Assistance Programme had been rebranded as the Individual Assistance Programme for Peers and MPs in recognition of the fact members do not identify as employees of the House. The PHWS was developing its strategy and was planning the introduction of a user group.

The trial of an on-site GP service in the Commons had been extended as 2020 had not been able to provide reliable data on uptake. Once that data was available a decision would be taken on whether the scheme would continue and whether it

would be extended to the Lords. Peers could still access GP services at the Victoria Medical Centre following a referral by the nurse.

Regular health screenings for members had been paused during the pandemic but were expected to re-start in the new year. The number of mental health appointments in the Parliamentary community was seen as a positive sign: the service had been proactively promoted to encourage early intervention. The numbers were broadly in line with other organisations.

It was noted that there was more the PHWS could do to communicate its services, particularly on the intranet.

The Committee took note of the update.

6. Parliamentary Travel Office (PTO) Procurement & Implementation Update S/21-22/40 RESTRICTED

The procurement process had been completed and Reed and MacKay had been awarded the contract for the PTO service. It was not expected that members would see any noticeable difference when the new supplier took over on 1 December. In order for the switch to take place the Travel Office would be closed for in person bookings on 29 and 30 November, but would continue to operate a full service on these days over the phone and by email.

The cost of out of hours calls would increase under the new contract from £25 to £29. The cost of the new contract was similar to the current supplier in the first year but was expected to reduce with the introduction of an online booking tool. Initially this would be introduced as a small trial and then rolled out more widely.

The Committee took note of the update.

7. Digital Works Update S/21-22/41 RESTRICTED

This was the first Digital Works Update to the Committee aiming to provide an overview of upcoming digital works in the next six months; it was hoped this would allow for feedback and engagement with members. Since the report was produced the move of the second data centre had been completed successfully. As part of the move all services had run through the other data centre for four days successfully; a test of the reverse would be completed in the new year.

The Transforming Digital Programme had been working with helpdesk staff to increase their knowledge, both in digital matters and the work of Parliament. The service would be moving to a modern service management system which would include chat functions, aiming to reduce the number of phone calls to the service and allowing those who prefer to call to do so more easily.

The new digital operating model was a recommendation from the Stance Report in 2019 and would put in place standards and controls in all areas impacted by digital, making things safer and improving the Houses' abilities to be an intelligent client.

Volunteers for digital pilots were advertised for periodically in Red Benches and PDS welcomed volunteers with all levels of digital abilities.

Following a question from a member, it was confirmed that the update to PeerHub to allow for staff to shadow the system where members were having issues would not allow for anyone other than the member to vote in divisions.

The Committee took note of the update.

8. Discussion: Options for the use of the Long Room, Bishops' Bar and Peers' Dining Room S/21-22/42 RESTRICTED

The paper set out six options for the future operation of the Long Room, Bishops' Bar and Peers' Dining Room. At this stage the Committee was not being asked to take a decision but being given an opportunity to ask questions ahead the Committee having the opportunity for wider consultation with members. The Chair along with the Director of Facilities and Head of Catering and Retail Services offered to attend party and group meetings to discuss proposals.

The Committee agreed to delay the decision paper until January in order to engage with as many members as possible. It was also agreed that the paper should include an assessment of the costs of each of the proposals alongside current operating costs, and that information about the sales mix would be provided.

9. Forward Work Programme S/21-22/43 UNRESTRICTED

The Committee took note of the forward work plan.

10. AOB

The next meeting would be on Thursday 9 December at 1pm.

Small sections of these minutes have been redacted, usually for reasons such as commercial confidentiality and sensitive management information.

Jen Mills
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