

Written evidence submitted by Miss Keisha Bullock-Singh

1. What topic(s) do you think the Modernisation Committee should prioritise and how do they link to one or more of the strategic aims set out in the Leader's memorandum?

We propose the Committee prioritise a focus on support for House of Commons staff working in the evening and at night as part of the aim to focus on culture and working practices.

The Liminal Space leads the Night Club initiative, which brings together employers, policy makers, shift workers and sleep scientists to improve the productivity, rights and health of night-time workers. Our economy is dependent on a hidden army of people who work through the night, with 8.7 million night-time workers in 2022.

Night Club is committed to educating night workers on how they can positively impact their own sleep health through a direct intervention; to encourage corporates to provide better working conditions for night workers; and to support policymakers in influencing businesses to take action.

Backed by the Wellcome Trust and University of Oxford, the Night Club programme has directly engaged thousands of frontline workers across the UK. Since its creation in 2018, Night Club's programmes have proven to be a highly effective tool in the workplaces of over 30 employers – directly engaging over 10,000 employees and many thousands more indirectly. Night Club is now looking to policymakers to drive wider progress and research into this often-overlooked area, including properly recognising and protecting night workers as a distinct group and encouraging employers to adopt best practice.

Night Club welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Modernisation Committee's call for evidence on the work of the Committee. The most recent House of Commons staff handbook acknowledges night shift workers as being particularly vulnerable to occupational accidents and ill-health, compared to other workers, and as having special considerations that may need to be taken account of in a health and safety context.

Night Club believes, however, that the understanding of and considerations made for those working at night working can be further developed, to benefit those working this shift pattern in the House of Commons. Note that – in line with the ONS – we include evening and very early morning workers as well as those working fully overnight in our advocacy for nighttime workers and would encourage the Committee to also adopt this broader definition which incorporates many roles in the Parliamentary estate given the nature of Parliamentary work.

As outlined in the memorandum from the Leader of the House of Commons and Chair of the Modernisation Committee, Rt Hon Lucy Powell MP, a key aim of the Committee is to improve the culture and working practices in the House of Commons. This includes ensuring the House of Commons is an inclusive working environment, that is open and accessible to people from all walks of life.

There are a significant number of employees working at night in the House of Commons, in both MPs offices and the wider parliamentary estate staff. There are additional considerations that need to be made

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to support these nighttime workers, and Night Club therefore believes the Committee should consider the impacts of working at night within the scope of creating an inclusive working environment.

The 'Great Parliamentary Sleep Survey' sponsored by Lord Tom Watson and run by Night Club in partnership with the Universities of Oxford and East Anglia is currently underway and asking staff across Parliament about their sleep levels which will provide a very relevant insight and further evidence/information about this issue specific to the Houses of Parliament.

2. Why would the topic(s) benefit from the attention of the Modernisation Committee?

Research shows working nights and poor sleep contributes to several serious health conditions. This includes workers being 44% more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes if working night shifts. A person working night shifts for 10 years is 37% more likely to have a heart attack. They are also at higher risk of developing a wide range of mental health conditions.

Overall, these negative health impacts exacerbate existing health inequalities.

Specifically looking at women, the health impacts of working at night are significant. This is due to women being more vulnerable to sleep disruption than men, and as a result of poor sleep, experiencing more difficulty adapting to night shift work. The sleep deprivation and insomnia faced by women working night shifts is associated with an increased menstrual cycle irregularity and dysmenorrhea, in addition to an increased risk of miscarriage and difficulty in conceiving.

Along with the negative health impacts of working night shifts, there are also considerable economic impacts associated with this shift pattern. This includes lack of sleep costing the UK economy £50 billion in GDP per year, in lost productivity, health and care costs.

As stated in the most recent House of Commons staff handbook, employees working in the House of Commons, including night shift workers, are guided by the Working Time Regulations. The Working Time Regulations states a night worker "will be offered a free health assessment before beginning night work and at intervals thereafter", although qualitative research conducted by Night Club shows that this is rarely provided.

Given that night work increases the risk of certain diseases, employers should offer nightshift workers this basic health assessment, with higher frequency health checks being offered on an ongoing basis to catch and treat health problems early – preventing chronic health conditions from developing.

Night Club has four key policy asks, with its leading ask being to change the Working Time Directive to require employers to deliver a health check to workers on an at least annual basis. This change would ensure night workers receive regular health screenings to support prevention of illness and proactive management of their health and wellbeing.

It is within the Modernisation Committee's power to encourage the House of Commons to show leadership around improving working practice and culture, by adopting best practice and offering its staff who work at night health checks on an at least annual basis. This is in addition to ensuring all nighttime

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employees in the House of Commons receive a health check before undertaking this working pattern. By recommending this, the Modernisation Committee will also role model and potentially build support for a more widely-applied straightforward, but impactful, amendment to the Working Time Directive.

3. Are you aware of examples from other Parliaments relevant to the topic(s) which may be interesting for the Modernisation Committee to consider?

Night Club is not aware of specific considerations made by other Parliaments to support workers who work at night. We would, however, like to draw the Committee's attention to the work being undertaken by Night Club to support businesses in enabling the health and wellbeing of employees working at night, as part of best practice.

Since its creation, Night Club has partnered with over 30 employers in the UK, including Network Rail, The Co-Op, British Airways, Britvic, BAE Systems, and Veolia. Following delivery of the Night Club programme at partner businesses, 80% of participants agree that they are confident they can make changes to improve their quality of their sleep. The programme has been proven to positively impact night workers' overall quality of sleep and improve their energy levels at work.

Best practice examples that our partner businesses currently follow include making health checks and related services available at night, which aligns with Night Club's vision of having annual health checks being offered throughout an employee's time working night shifts and in a way that is accessible to them.

Night Club would welcome the opportunity to facilitate a roundtable with members of the Committee and our providers to share best practice examples for night workers.

4. Is there any existing work relevant to the topic(s) which you think the Modernisation Committee can build on?

Key work includes our work with the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Select Committee in 2023 and the Great Parliamentary Sleep Survey which is currently underway.

Night Club was delighted to deliver evidence to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Select Committee session on post-pandemic economic growth in UK labour markets, in January 2023, to share insights about the numerous detrimental impacts of working at night. This includes highlighting how the impact of night work is a productivity and social issue, as well as being a health issue.

The Committee's subsequent report recommended that the Government should take more steps to provide protection for workers from any harmful effects of night-time working. It also calls for the Government to commission an investigation into the health and safety implications of night-time work.

Since the publication of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Select Committee's report, Night Club has continued to engage with Parliamentarians.

This includes meeting with a cross-party group of parliamentarians to brief them on our policy asks, which are: Changing the Working Time Directive to require annual health checks of night workers;

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recognising the 8.7 million night workers as a distinct group in the UK economy by assigning a responsible Minister; consulting industry leaders and sleep scientists on protections and outcomes for night workers and taking action on the findings; and funding greater research into the impacts of night work and ways to mitigate its health impacts.

In November 2024 Night Club launched the Great Parliamentary Sleep Survey, in partnership with Lord Tom Watson and the Universities of Oxford and East Anglia. This survey is an opportunity for MPs, Peers and those working in parliamentarians' offices to reflect on their own sleep health and is comprised of 12 short questions, asking about the quality, quantity and length of your sleep. All data collected as part of the Great Parliamentary Sleep Survey is anonymous and will be used to report on the impacts of sleep, plus support further research into sleep in atypical environments.

This survey would be an important and useful data point and give some focus and impetus for any future focus on sleep and the experiences of nighttime workers in Parliament.

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