

Written evidence submitted by ParliCare

ParliCare is a Workplace Equality Network in Parliament, supporting all passholders in Parliament who have caring challenges.

ParliCare was launched in June 2020 during the COVID pandemic when caring challenges were probably the most pronounced they had been in recent times.

ParliCare has to date (as of December 2024), just over 200 members including staff and members from the Lords, Commons and bicameral departments.

In our submission we address the following question which the Modernisation Committee has asked for submissions to address:

Question: 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?

Strategic Aim: Improving Culture and working practices

Where appropriate we have linked our feedback to the House of Commons 2024 Working Lives Survey¹

1. Carers' confidence in the workplace

ParliCare's mission is to 'to reach, and be accessible to, all employees, ensuring that they feel supported, guided, and empowered to address caring challenges at work, should they arise'.²

It is important that Parliament is a place where all colleagues feel safe in sharing their caring challenges. Carers are often isolated by their caring responsibilities, and this can be for many different reasons. Our colleagues who have caring responsibilities need to feel confident that they can share their caring challenges with their line manager and, depending on personal situations, more senior colleagues in their part of the organisation.

This can be very difficult for colleagues to do because while we strive to bring our professional selves to work, we cannot ignore our caring pressures, and to try to articulate this to others can cause a lot of anxiety.

House of Commons staff and bicameral staff are able to access a 'Carers Passport', which is a tool to enable staff to set out in writing their caring challenges and how their manager can support them.

In the House of Lords there is an 'Inclusion Passport' which again staff can use to set out their caring challenges, and which enables conversations with their manager.

¹ [ParliNet | Working Lives Survey 2024 - results](#)

² [ParliCare Mission Statement and Objectives for July 2024 – April 2025](#)

ParliCare has been working over the past 3 ½ years to improve colleagues' understanding more broadly of what carers' challenges are by holding events every-other month to hear from subject matter experts. However the WEN has a very small resource of 9 Committee Members in total, and there is much more that could be done to assess whether carers feel confident in the workplace. It is very heartening when we hear colleagues say to us that they are grateful that the WEN exists, and that the work we do supports them.

What could the Modernisation Committee do?

We would advocate that more should be done to assess whether all colleagues 'feel supported, guided, and empowered to address caring challenges at work, should they arise', to get a sense check of whether the culture in Parliament is inclusive and embracing of carers.

Carers should not feel judged; to the contrary, we would like to see a culture where all colleagues in Parliament recognise the 'benefits to the organisation and individuals that experience of caring brings'.³

2. Manager Capability

ParliCare recognises that for carers to feel supported in the workplace it is essential that their manager is understanding of their caring challenges. ParliCare acknowledges that in Parliament we have a wealth of policies that support carers, and we work closely with HR and Inclusion and Diversity Teams to ensure we communicate the support that is available to the ParliCare community.

However, it is not enough to have the policies, it is also important that Line Managers are confident to support those they line manage. ParliCare advocates that Line Managers take a tailored and supportive approach to line-managing colleagues with caring challenges. The more flexible managers are towards requests, the more flexible and agile carers can be in delivering their work and supporting those they care for.

We work in a demanding environment, but it is important that the culture in Parliament does not demand unnecessarily. We would advocate that Managers should be balanced and considerate.

What could the Modernisation Committee do?

Recommend that within line management training for Parliamentary staff, there is bespoke guidance for managers to help them to support direct reports who may have caring responsibilities. Training could also be offered to Members to help support them in their management of their own staff.

³ [ParliCare Mission Statement and Objectives for July 2024 – April 2025](#)

Initiatives such as this may go some way helping to address the feedback to the HoC 2024 Working Lives Survey finding: *Working arrangements and the parliamentary estate*: “Around two-thirds of staff (64%) are happy with their current working arrangements”; and “Most hybrid workers (69%) feel the balance between estate/remote working is about right.”

3. Microaggressions

Microaggressions towards carers can really have a huge impact. The feeling that others may judge you or your situation can add to what is already a very stressful work/life balance.

We would like to encourage training that identifies what micro-aggressions are, such as unjustifiably negative comments on when a person starts or finishes work; or comments on colleagues’ ‘online status’ e.g. “away” or “off-line”. Such comments may on the face of it seem trivial, but if as an organisation we can encourage staff to understand the pressures that carers are under, the more inclusive and supportive environment Parliament will be.

As a WEN we have not surveyed our membership in relation to micro-aggressions or bullying, but we believe that more could be done to assess whether carers experience negative behaviour.

Again, we would advocate a pro-active approach be taken to set out to all colleagues, on what it means to be a supportive manager and a supportive colleague.

4. Is there an inclusive culture in Parliament for carers?

At the moment ParliCare feels that we do not have the data to measure whether Parliament’s culture is inclusive for carers.

We would strongly advocate and advise that both Houses review their HR systems to consider if the categories of care could be expanded to increase the likelihood of a carer being able to identify as a carer and therefore able to select a specific declaration, as a lot of carers cannot identify with the limited categories available. We would advocate that this could be explored more broadly across the organisation to improve declaration rates, and improve the understanding of the carers profile across both Houses to help inform how best to support this very large segment of both workforces.

We can genuinely say we have seen a definite up-tick in engagement with our WEN, particularly from individual teams inviting the co-chairs to speak to them about our WEN, and sometimes more broadly about what ‘being a supportive colleague to a carer looks like’.

We continue to welcome opportunities to engage with training related initiatives which HR and I&D colleagues may be leading on, or where they may arise across the organisation.

ParliCare would be very supportive of a drive to unify everyone who works in Parliament with a common/standardised set of training that addresses carers’ challenges, and what inclusive behaviour and support looks like from managers and all colleagues. There is a current offer on the Commons ACT Learning resource.

Ensuring an inclusive environment also requires evaluation of effectiveness of ParliCare, and all WENs. Both I&D Teams of both Houses are encouraged to help WENs evaluate their “So What” impacts to ensure the WENs remain relevant to their membership, and both Houses. Measures could include financial wellbeing, health and wellbeing, effective coping strategies in place as a result of support/signposting received.

5. Proposals to help to get the culture right in Parliament for carers

ParliCare would welcome more engagement with MPs and senior leaders. We would really welcome their engagement in our Community meetings and our events. We often receive feedback from our members that when they hear from senior colleagues they feel more empowered. When senior colleagues engage with the WEN by attending meetings or events, this can bridge the gap, and brings colleagues together to show their support to one another.

Initiatives such as this may go some way helping to address the feedback the HoC 2024 Working Lives Survey finding: *Engagement and Culture*: “Sentiment around leadership visibility and delivery remains low, with only 44% of staff feeling leaders are sufficiently visible.”

We would also welcome being invited to speak to MPs or any other networks or forums to help us create more awareness around the challenges faced by carers and how managers or colleagues can support.

Whilst we recognise that delivering the work of Parliament is critical, we would welcome a culture that recognises that flexibility is an important part of that. Carers need to be able to balance their roles/work with their outside caring commitments. We would welcome a culture that recognises and respects colleagues contracted working hours.

We would welcome a culture that understands the benefit of carers in the workplace, not least the loss of Business experience/intelligence lost when carers feel they have no choice but to leave the workplace.

We would advocate that Managers should give as much advanced notice if colleagues need to engage with work outside of their normal working hours, or any changes that might affect their timetable as this will impact on their caring responsibilities.

We would welcome more opportunities for colleagues to learn more about all the WENs.

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