

Introduction

1. The Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body (“Sponsor Body”) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Women and Equalities Committee’s inquiry on *Gender-sensitive Parliament*, on behalf of the Houses of Parliament Restoration and Renewal Programme.
2. Our evidence will focus on the following question raised in the Committee’s Terms of Reference for the inquiry:

“The major refurbishment of Parliament taking place over the next decade – the Restoration and Renewal Programme – creates opportunities for positive changes. How can our buildings and facilities be changed to support a gender sensitive House of Commons?”

R&R: governance and organisational structure

3. In 2018, both Houses of Parliament agreed resolutions which stated that the “best and most cost-effective way” to carry out restoration and renewal of the Palace was for everyone to move out temporarily. Both Houses then passed legislation—the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Act 2019—which provides for a governance structure that enables strong oversight, challenge, and direction.
4. The **Sponsor Body** is the single client accountable to Parliament and oversees a Delivery Authority which carries out the work. The Sponsor Body was established in shadow form in July 2018 and became a statutory organisation separate from Parliament in April 2020. It owns the scope, budget and timescale of the Restoration and Renewal Programme.
5. The Sponsor Body is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the project, providing leadership and good governance, liaising with parliamentarians and other stakeholders, and monitoring performance. The Sponsor Body will also prepare a detailed and costed restoration and renewal plan, sometimes referred to as the Outline Business Case, which will be presented to both Houses of Parliament for their approval.
6. The Sponsor Board comprises MPs, Lords, and a number of external members, including Liz Peace CBE, Chair. The Executive Team is led by Sarah Johnson, Chief Executive.
7. The **Delivery Authority** will develop and deliver the work to the scope, budget and timescale set down by the Sponsor Body. It was set up as a company limited by guarantee in April 2020 and will procure and manage the contractors and supply chain. The Delivery Authority will engage a team of architects, engineers, project managers and contractors who will shape the future direction of the work, which is the biggest and most complex renovation of a heritage building ever undertaken in the UK.
8. The Delivery Authority is responsible for the work on the Palace of Westminster, including over 100 preparatory surveys which started in 2019 and will continue during 2021 and 2022. It will also deliver temporary accommodation for the House of Lords during the Programme’s decant phase.
9. One of its key tasks will be to support the Sponsor Body in the development of the detailed and costed restoration and renewal plan.

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10. The Delivery Authority Board includes Non-Executive Directors with a wide range of major project and programme, commercial and financial experience and expertise and is chaired by Mike Brown CBE MVO. Its Executive Team is led by David Goldstone CBE, Chief Executive.

Current progress

11. The 2019 Act splits the Programme into two phases:
 - Phase 1: The period during which the Sponsor Body and the Delivery Authority formulate proposals relating to the design, cost and timing of Palace restoration and renewal works. At the end of Phase 1 the Sponsor Body will present those proposals to both Houses in the form of a detailed and costed restoration and renewal plan, for the Houses' approval.
 - Phase 2: The period during which the Parliamentary building works are proposed to be carried out.
12. The Programme is still at a relatively early stage, developing the detailed and costed plans as part of Phase 1.
13. A large amount of consultation is still to be undertaken with Members, Peers, parliamentary staff, and externally regarding the design of the renovated Palace and any temporary accommodation. As a result, we are unable to say with any certainty at this stage about how the Palace of Westminster might be changed to support a gender sensitive House of Commons. We are interested in hearing from the Committee, Members, others in the parliamentary community, external experts, and the wider public on how this might be achieved within the Programme.
14. In this submission we will outline some of the high-level recommendations and steers relating to inclusivity that have been directed to the R&R Programme, explain some of the ways that an inclusive approach will be embedded within the Programme, and give information about our planned stakeholder consultation. It is worth noting that once R&R has completed the work to restore and renew the Palace of Westminster, it will be for both Houses to ultimately determine how Parliament functions within the building including the parliamentary calendar, sitting hours and the opportunity for remote voting.

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Gender inclusivity: recommendations and steers

15. Some external reports leading up to the commencement of the R&R Programme stressed the importance of embedding inclusivity within the restoration and renewal works. We cover these below.

The ‘Good Parliament’ report

16. The Good Parliament report by Professor Sarah Childs, published in July 2016, made several recommendations relevant to the R&R Programme, at a point when the Programme had not been formally endorsed by Parliament.
17. These references include:
 - Restoration and Renewal offers an additional opportunity for the House to deliver a new vision for Parliament, and in so doing to achieve international recognition as the ‘gold standard’ *Good Parliament* (p 2).
 - Any new body established to manage R&R must keep the principles of representation and inclusion firmly in its sights. With an explicit commitment to diverse representation and inclusionary politics, decisions could be taken, and action set in train, that would see the House of Commons become a globally recognised ‘best practice’ *Diversity Sensitive Parliament* in the very near future (p 11).
 - The Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster [...] and whatever new body comes into being thereafter, should be asking: What should the parliament of 2030 or 2050 be like? What form of building, what type of furniture, what style of décor, will deliver *The Good Parliament*, one that is truly representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective? (p 33)
 - Seeking to ensure that the artwork of the House is representative is a principle that has been accepted. The principle—of creating a representative relationship between the public and Parliament via its artwork—must be kept centre stage during the R&R process (p 39).
18. The Good Parliament report included recommendations to the House of Commons Procedure Committee (p 5) that, in the context of the expected temporary decant from the Palace of Westminster, there should be:
 - trial sittings of the House based around ‘normal business hours’;
 - trial opportunities for remote voting by MPs physically present on the Parliamentary Estate; and
 - trial new formats for Prime Minister’s Questions.
19. Recommendations were also made to the Sponsor Body (p 5), which at that point had not been formed, to:
 - Trial new layouts in any decant Chamber, and review provision of a new Chamber for the return to the Palace of Westminster;
 - Provide for flexible committee and other meeting rooms in a restored Palace;
 - Provide for inclusionary social spaces for MPs in a restored Palace; and
 - Provide sufficient toilet capacity across the Parliamentary Estate.
20. In respect of the recommendation to provide for inclusionary parliamentary spaces for MPs, the Good Parliament report made a number of specific proposals:

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- a. that the provision of ‘Lady’ Members rooms should be maintained in decant and in a restored parliament (and also the male changing room). This was necessary “both because of the hours that Parliament keeps and [...] because of the disproportionate number of men in the House”.
 - b. There should be a principle of equal provision in terms of furniture, including baby changing and caring furniture within these rooms.
 - c. Women MPs should be asked their preference for the name of the rooms—perhaps these might be named after pioneering women MPs or women political activists if the notion of the ‘Lady Member’ is felt to be anachronistic.
 - d. Given the existing hours and parliamentary calendar, the House should ensure that the hairdressing salon is maintained.
 - e. In the absence of reform of parliamentary hours, the provision of additional facilities on the estate might also be considered.
21. The Good Parliament report’s recommendation to “provide sufficient toilet capacity” made the following comments:
- a. Provision should be planned for a future sex/gender parity and diverse Parliament (MPs, staff and visitors). Failure to do so will limit who can visit, participate in the formal activities of, and work in, Parliament.
 - b. Baby changing facilities should be separate facilities accessible to all parents and carers and there should be easily accessible disabled toilets.
 - c. Unisex/gender neutral toilets should be provided.

Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster

22. The Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster was appointed by both Houses in July 2015 in order to consider the best way to proceed with the R&R Programme. The Committee’s report (HC 659), published in September 2016, stated: “It would be an error for Parliament to miss this rare opportunity to deliver a more open, efficient, inclusive and outward-facing Parliamentary building.”

Embedding an inclusive approach within the R&R Programme

Programme Strategic Themes, Goals and Steers

23. Since the agreement of the resolution by both Houses in early 2018, the Programme has proceeded in accordance with its terms and the Programme mandate which was subsequently agreed by both House Commissions in May 2018.
24. A set of strategic themes and goals were agreed by the then shadow Sponsor Board and the House Commissions in May 2019, to inform the options being considered as part of the Business Case Strategy. The Programme currently has six Strategic Themes, one of which is ‘Accessibility and Inclusion’:
- Health, Safety and Security
 - Accessibility and Inclusion
 - Functionality and Design

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- Sense of History
 - Sustainability
 - Time and Value for Money
25. Within these Themes there are 37 Goals, identifying what should be achieved in each theme, either in relation to outcomes for the restored Palace or during delivery of the Programme itself.
26. In addition, the Programme has been provided with a set of ‘Strategic Steers’. These were produced between September 2019 and June 2020 by a Joint Working Group of both House Management Boards in response to a formal request by letter from the Chair of the then Shadow Sponsor Board in July 2019. One of the Strategic Steers is again “Accessibility and Inclusion”.
27. Work is currently underway to develop high-level design assumptions which will inform the detailed and costed plan to be endorsed by Parliament. Initial steers from both Houses on the design assumptions—although still to be formally endorsed in both Houses—have provided direction that the Programme should aim to realise “exemplary levels of inclusion across the Palace”.

Strategic Review: programme strategic objectives

28. In 2020 the Sponsor Body undertook a Strategic Review of the R&R Programme. The purpose of the review was to consider whether anything had changed so significantly as to warrant a change in the strategy for the Programme. The Sponsor Body invited views from Members, Members’ staff, parliamentary staff, and members of the public. We also consulted with the Commissions of both Houses, as well as relevant parliamentary committees, on the draft Strategic Review recommendations.
29. As part of the Strategic Review, published in March 2021,¹ the Sponsor Body set Programme Strategic Objectives, to complement the already agreed Themes and Goals. These included ‘Essential’ Objectives (which were orientated around five of the Strategic Themes and drawn principally from the 2019 Act and the Resolutions agreed by both Houses in 2018) and ‘Stretch’ objectives (derived from the Themes and Goals and the Strategic Steers and which were used to determine the upper bound of what R&R could deliver).
30. In terms of the Accessibility and Inclusion Strategic Theme, the Strategic Review proposed the following essential and stretch objectives:

¹ <https://restorationandrenewal.uk/resources/reports/strategic-review>

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Strategic Theme	Proposed Essential Objective	Proposed Stretch Objective
5. Accessibility & Inclusion	Provide non-discriminatory and inclusive access to a substantial area of the building for the public, members and staff.	Provide non-discriminatory and inclusive access for all users to all areas of the building within heritage and planning constraints.

31. In addition, four further objectives were outlined which could be seen as highly desirable but currently without a formal mandate from both Houses. One of these related to inclusivity:

- Sense of History: Support Parliament’s new vision ‘to ensure the collections are inclusive and accessible to everyone for engagement and enjoyment, inspiring greater participation in UK parliamentary democracy.’

32. The Sponsor Body is engaging with the House Administrations on the Programme Strategic Objectives. The objectives will be formally adopted by the Programme and built into the process of developing the detailed and costed restoration and renewal plan, which will then be brought before both Houses for decision.

Diversity and inclusion team and strategy

33. The Programme employs a small Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) team that consists of professionals with expertise in understanding and practically applying the law to how we operate and how we deliver inclusive design. It consists of a Head of EDI and an Inclusive Design Manager. This team work together across the Sponsor Body, Delivery Authority, and supply chain.

34. The Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority are developing a joint diversity strategy . In drawing up this strategy, both organisations will have regard to the diversity and inclusion strategies of both Houses of Parliament and to the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.²

35. For procurement, and in line with the Government’s Policy Procurement Note on Social Value, we have implemented supplier requirements to ensure that suppliers contracted to work with the Delivery Authority contribute to the inclusive culture outlined in the strategic goals for Accessibility and Inclusion. Suppliers are required to produce an EDI plan with goals to help support an inclusive culture, report on diversity monitoring including gender identity, supply chain spend with women-owned businesses and provide EDI training.

36. While the Programme is in Phase 1, early work has begun with the Health, Safety and Wellbeing team on identifying the welfare standards required for inclusive working on site.

² [Parliamentary Relationship Agreement](#); [Programme Delivery Agreement](#)

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Equality Analysis

37. The Equality Analysis is a process to examine the potential impact of any new activity, or alteration to existing activity, on people with protected characteristics. The analysis will also include impacts on social mobility issues. The impacts relate to non-discrimination, harassment, or victimisation (of people with protected characteristics), promoting equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between people with protected characteristics and those who do not have those characteristics (as defined in the Public Sector Equality Duty, Section 149 Equality Act). An activity may be a policy, procedure, or design proposal, among other things.
38. The process to conduct, review and feedback on Equality Analyses is well established and practiced within the Programme, including for the whole of the design team, and overseen by the Inclusive Design Manager embedded within the Programme. These arrangements are further supplemented by in-house training of colleagues from all functions and the Executive Committee about Equality Analysis. Consultation of the design development with the Accessibility and Inclusion Steering Group is integral to the Equality Analysis process.
39. Programme-specific Equality Analysis Guidance and Equality Analysis Templates are available and accessible to all employees. The Equality Analysis Guidance document was developed in 2018. It describes the process of Equality Analysis, and is specifically written to take into account the RIBA Stages (the process through which design options are developed) and the type of work the Programme is undertaking. It includes good international practice. This guidance includes reference to project examples on the provision of nursing facilities and the need for designs to avoid designing obscure spaces that may lead to unwanted social behaviour, including sexual harassment. Currently this document is being reviewed for updating, when further examples will be added to reflect current best practice.
40. Aspirations for inclusive design (incorporating gender sensitive design) in parts of the Estate may sometimes be incompatible or conflict with other considerations and disciplines, such as heritage, building services and buildability. A collaborative inter-disciplinary working approach is therefore required to identify any such challenges at the outset. Such collaborative working is already underway on the Programme.

Stakeholder consultation and engagement

Parliamentary engagement

41. As Phase 1 continues to progress, the Programme is fully committed to engaging and working with parliamentarians and the wider parliamentary community on the development of detailed plans for the future Palace. We will be consulting Members of both Houses in the coming months on a range of topics, including how the Palace can be made more gender-sensitive and inclusive.
42. Specific consultation on the topic of inclusion will take place in June and July 2021. Later in 2021 Members and others in the parliamentary community will be consulted on the Palace plans under consideration. In both cases Members will have the opportunity to give their views to the Programme to help shape planning.

External engagement

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43. The 2019 Act requires the Sponsor Body to seek the views of the public as it determines the strategic objectives of and makes strategic decisions relating to the carrying out of the Parliamentary building works. As laid out in our Public Engagement Strategy, we intend to deliver a range of engagement activities to ensure that everybody who wants to has the chance to have their say on the building, while proactively targeting those who may be less likely to participate.³
44. In our work to seek the views of people from across the UK, we will place particular priority on actively seeking the views of the groups identified by House of Commons Library research as less likely to be engaged in politics and the work of Parliament.⁴ These include women, young people, people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, unskilled workers and people in long term unemployment, and disabled people.
45. We are also currently mapping external organisations that focus on these target groups, including groups who work with marginalised women and those that support or encourage women to get involved in politics. We hope that some of those organisations will become partners in our work. We aim to use the information learnt about the views of the public to inform decisions about the Programme.
46. We invited submissions from external stakeholders for the recent Strategic Review. We received submissions from experts on gender inclusivity and the need to embed inclusion in both the building design and public engagement and communication strategies was a theme in several submissions. We are grateful to those who shared their expertise and experience on inclusive building design in a parliamentary context.

Committee inquiry

47. We very much look forward to the Committee's report and taking on board your informed views following your evidence-gathering. We will seek to consider these carefully within the Programme.

April 2021

³ Restoration and Renewal, [Public Engagement Strategy](#)

⁴ House of Commons Library, [Political disengagement in the UK: who is disengaged?](#)