

House of Commons

Media and Communications Service (House & Corporate)

House of Commons, 14 Tothill Street.

Media enquiries tel: 0207 219 0718

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House of Commons Commission Media Briefing Note

At its regular monthly meeting last night (Monday), the Commission agreed a number of issues concerning the administration of the House of Commons as follows:

Mobile devices for Members

The Commission welcomed the Administration Committee's review of the financial savings and increased efficiency derived from Committee usage of mobile tablet devices. The Commission agreed to pilot the following measures:

- the House Service would offer iPads to Members on those select committees that agreed to electronic delivery of documents and so reduce expenditure on paper and reprographics and improve environmental performance
- Members would be permitted to swap one of their current pieces of IT equipment for an iPad if they wished. The returned item of equipment would then be used to replace obsolete equipment used by staff in the House Service, thus reducing replacement costs by at least £50k (based on 100 MPs returning a laptop) and defraying the cost of the purchase of the iPad
- further work would be undertaken to ascertain the level of additional savings which could be realised by wider use of iPads for MPs

These measures would be kept under review to assess the impact on parliamentary effectiveness and value for money.

Alcohol policy

The Commission takes its responsibility for the welfare of those who work on the Commons Estate very seriously. Following careful consideration of the issues around alcohol consumption it agreed the following actions to promote responsible alcohol use:

- a wider range of non-alcoholic drinks and lower strength beers will be provided in catering outlets
- staff serving alcohol would receive further training and support in refusing to serve customers when necessary
- at receptions and events where alcohol was served, glasses would be topped up less frequently
- further promotion of the support available to Members and House staff by the occupational health service and the Speaker's Chaplain
- consultation to take place with the Administration Committee, the House of Lords and the Sports and Social club on the opening hours of bars on the Parliamentary Estate

On pricing, the Commission noted that significant price increases had occurred in recent years and that bar prices were now comparable to high street pubs.

Trees in Portcullis House

The Commission noted that the trees in Portcullis House provide essential natural regulation of temperature, humidity, air quality and sound proofing and that if they were removed, expensive (c£500k plus running costs of between £15k - £20k pa) and environmentally unfriendly mechanical systems would be required in their place.

The Commission welcomed the results of the renegotiation of the contract for the trees which has resulted in the following:

- the contractor will donate the trees, external shrubs and maintenance equipment to Parliament
- a 60% reduction in the cost of the contract for maintenance not only of the trees but also of the external shrubbery (from approximately £44k to £18.5k plus VAT pa)

The Commission welcomed the outcome of the renegotiation which has resulted in ownership of the trees, shrubs and equipment; no disruption to the area or harm to the trees; continued environmental sustainability and support to a small British company.