ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2012
AT 4.30PM IN COMMITTEE ROOM 16, PALACE OF WESTMINSTER

Members present:

Sir Alan Haselhurst (in the Chair)

Graham Evans
Thomas Docherty
Mr Kevan Jones
Nigel Mills
Sarah Newton
Mr Desmond Swayne
Mark Tami
Keith Vaz
Mr Dave Watts
Mike Weatherley

1. NOTES OF DISCUSSION

The Committee approved the informal note of the meeting held on 19 November.

Matters arising: The Committee deferred consideration of an update on banqueting terms.

The Committee noted that a previously postponed joint meeting with the House of Commons Commission would occur on 3 December, and would consider filming and photography rules.

The Committee noted an update on switchboard services.

The Committee noted an update on the House Administration.

The Committee agreed a request by Jack Dromey MP for filming in a Committee Room for a cross-party event focused on homeless young people.

The Committee endorsed a proposal made by Richard Tapner-Evans, Interim Director of Catering, to increase the number of guests Members may take into certain catering facilities.

2. UPDATE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Committee noted an update from Robert Rogers, Clerk of the House and Chief Executive. The Vote Office would no longer provide a service on Saturdays, and a
Travel fair would be held in the Attlee Suite on 4 December for Members and Members’ staff.

3. **ANNUNCIATORS**

Mel Barlex, Parliamentary Estates Director, briefed the Committee.

Mr Barlex informed the Committee that a programme to replace all analogue televisions on the estate with digital televisions was in progress and would be completed in the summer of 2013. Testing of additional digital channels had been successful, together with testing of division bells. All areas been identified as having problems had been addressed. The division bells could be included on digital sets owing to the introduction of new technology not previously available. Similarly, a problem regarding subtitles had been resolved with the introduction of new equipment. It was not possible to switch existing television sets to the digital service until all the analogue televisions had been replaced. Up to 100 channels would potentially be available once the switchover had occurred. Mr Barlex would report back in March 2013.

4. **MECHANICAL AND ENGINEERING WORKS**

Mel Barlex, Parliamentary Estates Director, briefed the Committee.

Mr Barlex said that on-going mechanical and engineering works would affect Members, Members’ staff and House staff. Two separate projects were under way. The replacement of cooling towers would take two years and would start in January 2013. Temporary cooling towers would be constructed and these would affect five or six Members’ offices at the southern end of the estate. There would be disturbance owing to noise and daylight obstruction. Daylight strip lights and sealing of windows would minimise that disturbance.

The second project concerned the cast-iron roofs of the Palace of Westminster. Previous work in Speaker’s Court had taken two years, and the first phase of the next part of that project would commence shortly. Work would be undertaken at night to minimise noise and disruption to Members.

A Member asked whether contracts for works ensured that they took the minimum time possible. Mr Barlex said that contracts had been defined to make optimum use of contractors. He noted that the pieces of work were increasing and required to be properly managed to achieve the best economic value. Nugatory spend was taken into consideration when work was planned.

Another Member commented on an article in the *Evening Standard* to the effect that the Palace of Westminster did not conduct fire inspections. Mr Barlex informed the Committee that the article was incorrect and that the Palace was subject to 24/7 inspection. The Palace was also subject to the Regulatory Reform Order, inspections were maintained by the Crown Premises Inspectorate, and the House had an active Fire and Safety Committee. Since 2005, the numbers of fires reported had reduced by 95%.

Members noted the fire safety provision viewed during a tour of the Palace earlier in the year, and commented on the role of contractors in relation to fire safety. Mr
Barlex said that contractors were bound by health and safety rules, and could be removed from site in case of any breach. Further information on that point would be supplied to the Committee.

5. **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

THE COMMITTEE WILL NEXT MEET, JOINTLY WITH THE HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION, ON MONDAY 3 DECEMBER 2012 AT 5 PM IN COMMITTEE ROOM 16.