
Agreed jointly by the House of Commons Commission and the House of Lords Commission.

June 2019
RESPONSE TO THE GENDER SENSITIVE PARLIAMENT AUDIT

Introduction from the Commissions of both Houses

The Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit of 2018 was the first ever such audit in the UK.

We are grateful to the Members and staff of both Houses who took part in the audit, as well as to staff from the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the House Administrations for facilitating it.

We welcome the report and its finding that steady progress has been made in increasing the representation of women in both Houses of Parliament. We are firmly committed to ensuring that Parliament represents the people of the UK to the best of its ability, and this self-assessment offers insight into how we are doing, and what more we can do, in terms of gender.

The Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit Panel have made a number of recommendations about how we can build on our successes and tackle the barriers that remain for women who wish to enter or remain in Parliament, as members, or as staff of the two Houses.

Since the report’s publication in December, we have consulted a wide range of groups and individuals across Parliament with relevant responsibilities in order for us to publish a response to each of the report’s recommendations, and in response to the audit panel’s view that: “We strongly recommend that, in developing an action plan in response to the report, the Commissions consult widely across Parliament on how our recommendations might best be implemented.”

The responses we have received are summarised below. They include references to much good work already underway.

While the audit took a wide view of gender-sensitivity in Parliament, our focus as the House of Commons and House of Lords Commissions must be on those recommendations that fall within the remit of the Commons Service and the Lords Administration. These are the recommendations we have elected to prioritise, and in particular:

- Developing a parliamentary policy for children and families, informed by good practice in other parliaments; and facilities which support the policy (recommendations 24 and 25 – see page 8)
- Responding to the Cox report, and those of the forthcoming inquiries, in relation to bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct (recommendations 31 and 32 – see page 11)
- Awareness of the support available to MPs, peers and all staff to address abuse and threats via social media, and keeping this support under review (recommendation 34 – see page 13)
- Making information more readily available and more clearly signposted on the different groups or organisations in Parliament with specialist knowledge, to support parliamentarians to take account of gender impacts in their work (recommendation 45 – see page 16)

As Commissions, we commit to monitoring and publishing progress against these priority recommendations on an annual basis.

More broadly, we see this audit as the first in a series. We would expect our successors to repeat the exercise regularly, and thereby monitor progress against the report in its totality.

1 References to paragraph numbers are to the “Conclusions and Recommendations” chapter of the report (pp. 27–34 of the report), unless otherwise stated.
The remainder of this response deals with each of the recommendations of the Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit in turn. Some of these recommendations relate solely to one House. Responses are marked as from the Commons or Lords Commission specifically where appropriate.
Full response

Recommendation 6. Campaign financing (factor c) is not a matter for the parliamentary authorities. However, we are aware of efforts by the Government to reduce financial barriers for disabled candidates via the Access to Elected Office Fund, and we consider there should be a further extension of this scheme beyond summer 2019.

Bicameral response

We note this recommendation, which is a matter for the Government.

The Minister for Women and Equalities has responded that the Government Equalities Office is undertaking a programme of work to help political parties to better support disabled candidates and look at a long-term solution. This included the launch, in December 2018, of the Enable Fund for Elected Office, open until 2020, which replaced the Access to Elected Office Fund.

Recommendation 7. Although attracting candidates is predominantly a matter for political parties or the House of Lords Appointments Commission, we believe there is a role for the Education and Engagement Team, the two Communications teams, and the Parliamentary Digital Service in demonstrating visibly that people from all backgrounds are welcome, including:
a. Greater engagement with organisations supporting the increased diversity and inclusivity of Parliament;
b. Continuing existing efforts to make the parliamentary website more accessible and inclusive; and
c. Ensuring outreach and social media activity captures the work of parliamentarians in all their diversity (this is explored further in Chapter 3).

Recommendation 42. We welcome the efforts of the Education and Engagement Team, the Communications teams, and the Parliamentary Digital Service to be gender sensitive in their work to open up Parliament to the public. We recommend that, to ensure this is undertaken consistently, the Team develops a formal policy on public engagement and gender, including a means of monitoring compliance with the policy.

Bicameral response

These two recommendations are linked, and so we are responding to them both here.

We agree with the audit panel that attracting a diverse range of candidates is a matter for parties and the House of Lords Appointments Commission, which is independent of the House. However, we acknowledge that the wider public perception of Parliament also has an impact on prospective candidates.

It is vital that Parliament is seen as a place where people from all backgrounds are welcome. Promoting public understanding of the House of Lords and engagement with its work is a strategic objective for the House of Lords Administration. Similarly, Involving and Inspiring the Public is a strategic objective for the House of Commons Service. We welcome the establishment of the
Public Engagement Group, a small working group from across the two House and bicameral services in Parliament to develop a formal policy on public engagement.

**Recommendation 9.** One exception [to the apparent lack of obstacles to either women or men taking up leadership positions] is the Panel of Chairs in the Commons. Although we believe that to achieve gender parity the focus should be on removing barriers for women to take up positions of leadership in Parliament, rather than on quotas or targets, we note that it would be straightforward for the Panel of Chairs to be made more diverse over time, as decisions about membership lie within the gift of the Speaker.

*Commons Commission response:*

We note this recommendation, which is a matter for the Commons Speaker.

Mr Speaker agrees that the Panel of Chairs could and should be more diverse in its membership, and has noted that this is easier to achieve at the start of a Parliament, when the Panel is set up, but more difficult in the middle of a Parliament, as there are only new members added if another leaves, which is rare.

**Recommendation 11.** The system in the Lords, however, was considered to be more reliant on patronage, which tends to discriminate against minority groups. The Lords might therefore consider reforming their system as follows:

a. Establishing a single, transparent process for nominating committee membership; and

b. More frequent turnover of committee membership.

*Lords Commission response:*

We note the audit’s finding that more might be done in the Lords to ensure that minority groups can participate fully in committee work. The House’s approach to turnover of committee membership, including the rotation rule, is being considered as part of the Lords Liaison Committee’s review of committees. We would look to that Committee and its report to provide guidance about the right approach that balances the benefits of regular membership turnover with those of membership continuity. Nominations to committees are identified within each party or group through their own chosen mechanism, and it is not for the Lords Commission to dictate how nominations should be reached. However, we have drawn these conclusions and recommendations to the attention of the Usual Channels in the Lords.

**Recommendation 12.** We also recommend the introduction of a general principle that select committees should not meet before 9.30am, so that parliamentarians have an equal opportunity to take part in them, irrespective of childcare responsibilities.
Lords Commission response:

We endorse this recommendation and note that, in practice, it is rare for Lords committees to meet before 9.30am. We recognise the importance of all parliamentarians having an equal opportunity to participate in committee work, and we welcome the existing flexibility that committees have to vary their meeting times to accommodate the needs of members.

Commons Commission response:

This recommendation is a matter for the Commons Liaison Committee. We welcome the view of the Commons Liaison Committee that committees should not meet before 9.30am if that were to prevent Members from attending due to caring responsibilities. We suggest that this view is reflected in the guidance for Select Committee teams.

**Recommendation 13.** We consider that it would be appropriate for a parliamentary body to monitor the gender breakdown of MPs and peers and those in leadership positions, and to publish the results. We recommend that the Women and Equalities Committee and the Joint Committee on Human Rights should consider exercising their existing power to meet jointly to carry out this task on an annual basis.

Lords Commission response:

We accept the audit’s recommendation that this data ought to be monitored and published. Much of the data regarding Lords membership and office holders is already available on the intranet, and we agree that it would be useful for this to be brought together by the Lords Administration and published in the Annual Report. We also ask the Lords Committee of Selection to carry out annual monitoring regarding Lords committee membership and chairing.

Commons Commission response:

We accept the audit’s recommendation that this data ought to be monitored and published. In terms of how it is to be achieved, we note that the Women and Equalities Committee is working with the Joint Committee on Human Rights to look at options for jointly commissioning this information to be provided to both committees on an annual basis for them to consider any response or follow up work required.

14. To assist with this monitoring, we add our voice to calls to implement section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, which requires parties to publish data on the diversity of candidates standing for election. This could also be voluntarily extended to include appointments to the Lords, for example by political parties publishing the gender balance of appointment candidates.
Lords Commission response:

We note this recommendation and recognise the important role that data reporting can play in helping to improve the diversity of candidates. We would welcome the independent House of Lords Appointments Commission publishing regularly the data that they hold regarding the gender balance of those who put themselves forward for appointment via HoLAC. We would in principle also welcome HoLAC publishing similar statistics regarding party-political appointment candidates. However, we note that the varied ways in which party-political appointment candidates are identified might make producing and publishing accurate and informative data challenging.

Commons Commission response:

We note this recommendation, which is a matter for the Government. The Minister for Women and Equalities has responded that political parties have ultimate responsibility for their candidate selection and should lead the way in improving candidate diversity. She recognised the voluntary action that many parties were already taking and noted that a one-size-fits-all solution would not be appropriate because of the different starting points of each party.

Recommendation 16. The House Administrations may wish to consider what data might be collected to allow future audits to take account of the experiences of individuals of other gender identities and greater consideration of intersectionality in discussing people’s experiences in Parliament.

Bicameral response

We agree with the audit panel that it is important to have good data about the people who form the parliamentary community and their experiences here. We welcome the ongoing work of the two Administrations to ensure that they have a robust system for recording diversity data. We would support proposed changes to categories that will allow for the gathering of data on binary and non-binary gender identities.

Recommendation 17. We recommend that Erskine May should include a new chapter in future editions on gender sensitivity.

Bicameral response

We endorse this recommendation, which is a matter for the Clerk of the House and the Clerk of the Parliaments.

Through this first audit, Parliament has demonstrated its deep interest in ensuring that its policies, procedures, and culture are gender-sensitive. We note that it is too late to influence the 25th edition, which has already been submitted to the publisher, but as and when the Erskine May is next updated, the reflection of the steps taken to improve gender sensitivity, and where appropriate any findings of this or future audits, in a new text would be welcome.
Recommendation 20. Recent changes to sitting hours have benefitted MPs who are based in London but not helped those who live further away. We noted, however, that it would be impossible to come up with a set of hours that would work for everyone. Reforms should therefore focus on greater predictability and more efficient use of time.

Recommendation 21. As a first step, a review should be undertaken in each House to consider how efficient it is at carrying out its business and assess options for reform such as:

a. More advance notice of the parliamentary calendar, including setting expected sitting days up to a year in advance;

b. More predictability in, and advance notice of, the scheduling of business, including a set time for voting (although the benefits of the current system were noted regarding the potential for MPs to cast their vote in response to arguments made during the debate) and a time set aside for “important questions”;

c. Compressing the sitting week into fewer days;

d. More closely aligning recess dates and school holidays, to increase the ability of members from all parts of the United Kingdom to spend time with their families; and
e. Setting expectations in relation to committee workload, including in relation to consideration of committee reports and the timing of Committee visits.

Lords Commission response:

This recommendation is for the House. As recognised in the audit report, it is difficult to devise a set of sitting times that suit the wide range of members of both Houses. In respect of committee work (recommendation 21(e)), the Lords Liaison Committee will be considering these issues as part of its ongoing review of committees. It is a matter for the Procedure Committee to consider recommendations 20 and 21(a)-(d). However, we do not detect a strong desire for more fundamental reform at this time.

Commons Commission response:

This recommendation is for the House. As recognised in the audit report, it is difficult to devise a set of sitting times that suit the wide range of members of both Houses. We welcome the stated intention of the Procedure Committee to repeat its survey of Members for their views on sitting hours once the current session is ended, with a view to facilitating a decision by the present House on its sitting hours for the remainder of the Parliament. However, we have not detected in our consultation a strong desire for more fundamental reform at this time.

Recommendation 22. At the time of agreeing our report, the House of Commons had not yet considered a substantive motion to implement its decision in principle to allow new parents to vote in a division by proxy. Such a motion should be brought forward immediately. MPs taking leave from the House in this way should not be subject to any reduction in their staffing budgets, as the work of their offices is likely, if anything, to increase during this time.
Recommendation 23. We also consider that the parties should look to reinforce informal pairing arrangements for other caring needs; and recommend that consideration be given by the House of Commons to how, where pairing is used, the members in question might have their vote “by pair” formally recorded.

Commons Commission response:

We welcome the decision of the House of 28 January to introduce proxy voting and agree that there should be no reduction in staffing budgets. In our view, pairing arrangements should continue to be an internal matter for the parties rather than the House of Commons.

Recommendation 24. Developing a parliamentary policy for children and families, informed by good practice in other parliaments, would be an initial first step to a more family-friendly institution and would also address safeguarding concerns. Such a policy should include the following:

a. Clearer guidance on what is allowed, including a provision that infant feeding should be allowed everywhere;

b. A clear statement of safeguarding issues and expectations around supervision, including consideration of whether children and family members could be passholders; and

c. An enhanced commitment and joined up approach to the provision of childcare.

Recommendation 25. Facilities should be provided which support the policy. We would expect these to include:

a. Better facilities for expressing milk (including for visitors);

b. Retaining the Family Rooms as dedicated spaces for families but with improvements and more consistent enforcement of their use for these purposes;

c. Provision for children and family members of different ages (including older children);

d. An information tool for parents working in Parliament; and

e. More facilities that support the needs of parliamentarians that stem from unsociable hours.

Bicameral response

We accept these recommendations and have identified them as a priority for action by the House Administrations. We agree that a parliamentary policy, including the items listed in recommendation 24, and others that may be appropriate, should be drawn up bicamerally. We invite the Services Committee in the Lords and the Administration Committee in the Commons, in due course, to consider this policy and the facilities that might be needed to support it, including those proposed in recommendation 25, noting of course the limitations on space available on the parliamentary estate and the ongoing review of the number and types of passes that grant access to the estate.
We suggest that the parliamentary policy and proposals for additional facilities should also be fed into the Restoration and Renewal consultation with a view to ensuring that the parliamentary estate of the future meets the needs of parliamentarians and staff who are parents and carers.

Recommendation 26. Away from the parliamentary estate, we encourage IPSA to give consideration to how the childcare needs of MPs whose family life is unavoidably split between Westminster and their constituency might better be supported. This would be a natural extension of IPSA’s recent decision to take account of the different accommodation needs of MPs, which we welcome. IPSA should also give consideration to the means in which these claims are reported, so that no-one in need is deterred from accessing support.

Commons Commission response:

We note this recommendation, which is a matter for IPSA.

IPSA responded by highlighting to the changes it made following its 2017 consultation to remove the cap on travel claimed by spouses, dependants and carers and allocate additional budget to cover accommodation for dependants; but noted that it does not currently fund the cost of childcare, which it considers to be a personal cost and outside of IPSA’s remit. IPSA committed to considering the recommendation fully the next time it reviews the Scheme.

Recommendation 28. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has expressed public concern that due regard may not have been given by the House of Commons authorities to the duties of public authorities under the Equality Act to:

• Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
• Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
• Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

This was exemplified by the report of Dame Laura Cox into the bullying and harassment of House staff, which although only advisory went to the heart of the management of the elected House. We believe that both Houses have a duty to apply to themselves the important and fundamental parts of the Equality Act, including section 19, that they spent so much time discussing.

Commons Commission response:

Although the public sector equality duty under Part 11 of the Equality Act 2010 does not apply to the House of Commons, the House Service seeks to ensure that prohibited conduct is eliminated, that equality of opportunity is advanced and that diversity and good relationships are fostered and valued. Senior management in the House of Commons met with Equality and Human Rights Commission officials in April 2018, in relation to media reports of the bullying and harassment of
House staff, and in November 2018 in relation to Dame Laura Cox’s report into the bullying and harassment of House staff. The Commons Service has endeavoured to keep the Equality and Human Rights Commission informed of its proposed course of action in respect of bullying and harassment, and to meet with or provide information to its officials as requested. The Service will continue to develop diversity and inclusion through its Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2018-22, progress against which will be reported quarterly to the Commons Executive Board.

Lords Commission response:

Although this recommendation refers explicitly to the House of Commons, equality, diversity and inclusion are a priority too for the Lords. Bullying and harassment are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Through our external members, an independent inquiry has been established into bullying and harassment in the Lords, led by Naomi Ellenbogen QC.

We also welcome the work already done in support of equality, diversity and inclusion by the Lords Administration through its Diversity and Inclusion Plan 2016-2018, the launch of its new Focus on Inclusion Plan 2019-2021, and the application of the Independent Complaints and Grievances Scheme to Lords Administration staff along with the House of Commons.

Recommendation 29. In doing so, Parliament should consider how MPs and peers might be supported to ensure they exercise comparable duties towards their own staff; and ensure political parties aren’t forgotten.

Lords Commission response:

We agree with the audit panel on the importance of all parliamentarians and political parties treating their staff in a manner that prevents discrimination, bullying, harassment, and victimisation, and advances equality of opportunity and good relations amongst all groups of people. We welcome the planned rollout of appropriate training to peers regarding the Behaviour Code for Parliament and to support those who employ staff and encourage all our colleagues to undertake this or similar training to better exercise their responsibilities.

Commons Commission response:

We agree with the audit panel on the importance of all parliamentarians treating their staff in a manner that prevents discrimination, bullying, harassment, and victimisation, and advances equality of opportunity and good relations amongst all groups of people.

This recommendation is primarily a matter for MPs as the employers of their own staff, and for the political parties as employers. There is a limit to the support that the House can provide for MPs in their functions as employer, without running the risk of itself being treated as the employer of the members’ staff.

However, the House Service does provide MPs with HR advice and support for dealing with particular issues, and a helpline for members’ staff to obtain support. Moreover, we welcome the planned rollout of training to MPs regarding the Behaviour Code for Parliament, and to support those who employ staff and encourage all our colleagues to undertake this or similar training to better under their responsibilities. A Good Employer Standard has also been developed and is currently in consultation. This, once approved and rolled out, will provide clarity around what is expected of Members as employers, along with providing support and guidance. The Standard will also explicitly incorporate the Behaviour Code and related training.
Recommendation 31. In responding to the Cox report, and those of the forthcoming inquiries, the parliamentary authorities should:

a. Examine what other Parliaments have done, including the examples set out in the IPU's report on Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff in parliaments, and adopt good practice; and

b. Examine the recommendations arising from the Women and Equalities Committee inquiry into sexual harassment and respond.

Recommendation 32. From our own discussions, measures might include (but not be limited to):

a. Better support for whistle-blowers;

b. Acknowledging that not all staff will want to report complaints formally, a means by which staff can raise issues, such as via surveys or feedback;

c. Proactive communication on where members’ and Administration staff can seek HR and external forms of support, and making the HR Advisory Service available for MPs in the Customer Hub;

d. Training for staff on having difficult conversations and for line managers on how to support them; and

e. Support for Administration staff who are required to enforce the rules of the two Houses, such as around pass-wearing.

Stronger communication about the training that is available for members and all staff. Moreover, noting that all those who hold a parliamentary pass are required to undertake compulsory training on fire safety, passholders should be required to confirm that they have completed a training course on bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment, either via an external provider such as ACAS or an internal course.

Commons Commission response:

We accept recommendation 31 and have identified it as a priority for action by the House Service. We have previously directed the Commons Executive Board (CEB) to prepare an action plan in response to the Cox report, and the CEB has agreed that this plan should be informed by learning from other organisations. An Independent Director for Cultural Transformation has recently been appointed to lead the development of the plan. We will request that the Independent Director examines the experiences and recommendations of the specific organisations and reports listed in the recommendation and reports back to us on how they have been taken account of in the plan. Where the findings and recommendations of future inquiries fall within our remit, we will ensure our response is similarly informed by this learning.

In relation to the measures described in recommendation 32:

a. Better support for whistle-blowers

We accept this recommendation. The House Service is about to enhance its bullying and harassment contacts arrangement by replacing it with a Guardians scheme, which will encompass advice and support to staff considering raising a Whistleblowing complaint in the same way that they will support those with issues relating to bullying and harassment. The House Service will also
commit to raising the profile of the Protect Charity (the independent charity cited in our Whistleblowing Policy which can give free and confidential advice on disclosure of malpractice matters).

b. Acknowledging that not all staff will want to report complaints formally, a means by which staff can raise issues, such as via surveys or feedback;

We acknowledge fully that some staff will not want to report complaints formally and they have the opportunity in the annual staff survey to communicate their concerns. The grievance procedure encourages informal resolution of issues wherever possible. Additionally, staff are encouraged to raise issues of concern with their line manager, at team meetings, with their trade unions, at town hall meetings/Q&A sessions, and through the Compliments, Complaints and Comments Project.

c. Proactive communication on where members’ and Administration staff can seek HR and external forms of support, and making the HR Advisory Service available for MPs in the Customer Hub;

We regularly promote such services through our intranet and regular staff newsletters. Members have two regular publications ‘The Term Ahead’ and the ‘The Fortnight’ and we use these to advertise support and advice services. The Members’ Staff newsletter, ‘Commons View’ has a standing item on the HR support available to them through the new MP Staff Advice Service. We are also about to launch a MP Staff HR handbook. As part of the work we are doing on the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme we have also held information drop-in sessions. We are always looking for different ways to communicate these services and welcome the useful suggestion of connecting these promotional activities with the Customer Hub.

d. Training for staff on having difficult conversations and for line managers on how to support them;

We provide specific training and support for staff on having difficult conversations where a need is identified, along with a more general programme of management training which focuses on developing and supporting a coaching approach to people management. As part of our work in responding to the Dame Laura Cox report, and promoting the new Behaviour Code, we will increase the resources we have available to provide staff and others with the tools to challenge poor behaviour.

e. Support for Administration staff who are required to enforce the rules of the two Houses, such as around pass-wearing.

There is a clear expectation that our managers will support their staff in enforcing House rules. There have been a number of communications reminding everyone of the importance of wearing their security pass, including a ‘Wear Your Pass with Pride’ campaign which included a video highlighting our responsibilities in making the pass system effective for all our safety. These campaigns also clearly put across the message that those challenging people who aren’t wearing their pass has the House’s support in doing so. Our new Behaviour Code makes it clear that everyone should be treated with courtesy, dignity and respect – and not behaving in this way to staff doing their job will be grounds for a complaint under the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme.

f. Stronger communication about the training that is available for members and all staff. Moreover, noting that all those who hold a parliamentary pass are required to undertake compulsory training on fire safety, passholders should be required to confirm that they have completed a training course on bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment, either via an external provider such as ACAS or an internal course.
All new Commons Service and PDS staff are required to attend an initial Welcome to Parliament session which features a fire safety briefing. All current Commons and PDS staff are required annually to complete an online Essentials e-learning module covering fire safety, health and safety, general security and cyber security. We are currently developing a version of this module for MPs’ staff, due for release in March. Workshops designed to tackle bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct are being designed and will be piloted from February. They will be mandatory for all House of Commons staff, available for all Members and their staff from spring 2019, and mandatory for MPs following the next election, in accordance with the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme passed by the House in July 2018.

Lords Commission response:

Although the Cox inquiry related only to the House of Commons, it contains important lessons that the Lords, too, can learn. We welcome these recommendations and, in responding to the Ellenbogen report, will look to incorporate the recommendations of Cox, the Women and Equalities Committee and best practice elsewhere into our thinking.

Recommendation 33. We welcome the new Behaviour Code for Parliament that has been designed to apply to all those working in or visiting Parliament. We recognise, however, the need to ensure the operation of a seamless duty of care for political party staff, regardless of the location in which they are working. We recommend that political parties adopt their own codes with parallel language to ensure consistent treatment of those working in the political arena.

Bicameral response

The actions of political parties are a matter for each party’s governance structure, and we welcome the information provided by the chairmen of the main political parties about the measures they have in place to support staff. We would welcome any further steps that might be taken to ensure consistent treatment of those working in the political arena, in line with best practice.

Recommendation 34. We recommend that the parliamentary authorities take steps to ensure that:
• MPs, peers and all staff are aware of the support available from their local police and the Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team to address abuse and threats via social media, as well as other appropriate support from the Members’ Security Support Service and Health Assured, the Employee Assistance Programme.
• This support is kept under review to keep step with digital innovations.

Bicameral response

We share the audit panel’s concern about the abuse and threats levied against MPs, peers and staff. We accept this recommendation and have identified it as a priority for action by the House Administrations. We commend the work done to date by the Consultative Panel on Parliamentary Security, the Serjeant at Arms, Black Rod, and the Parliamentary Security Department to bring the available support services to the attention of members and their staff.
We note that, as of 30 November 2018, 100% of MPs had engaged with the Members’ Security Support Service regarding access to recommended security measures, and that all new peers have a 1:1 security briefing from a PSD Director, Deputy Director or senior manager as part of their induction. We welcome these groups keeping the support services under review and continuing their work to make them easily available to all those who might need them.

**Recommendation 36.** We consider that the Speaker’s guide to behaviour in the Chamber in the Commons, and a parallel guide to be established in the Lords, could provide a framework for defining what is and is not acceptable, with a role for the Whips, the Convenor of the Crossbench Peers, and all members in proactively challenging and calling out behaviour that does not meet the agreed standard.

*Lords Commission response:*

As a self-regulating House, the House of Lords conducts its business in accordance with the general sense of the House. We therefore agree with the audit panel that all members have a responsibility to ensure that their own behaviour is appropriate according to the general sense of the House, and to tackle inappropriate behaviour, and we also recognise the important role of the Usual Channels in ensuring that the customs of the House are followed.

*Commons Commission response:*

We endorse the sentiment of this recommendation but do not consider that the pamphlet in its current form provides the best means of addressing it. The Behaviour Code adopted by the House in July 2018 sets out clear standards of behaviour by which all Members of the House should abide, including the requirement to call out unacceptable behaviour when you see it.

**Recommendation 37.** Although we support retaining the use of impersonal language in the chambers to encourage courtesy, how this is achieved should be a matter of further consideration.

*Lords Commission response:*

As a self-regulating Chamber, the House of Lords conducts its business in accordance with the general sense of the House.

*Commons Commission response:*

Given the panel’s view that the use of impersonal language in the chambers should be retained, to encourage courtesy, we are not convinced that this requires further consideration at this stage.

**Recommendation 38.** We recommend that adequate time should be given to front-bench members to be seated in the House of Commons chamber during the transition between items of business, so that the public perception of the business of the chamber is that it is orderly and dignified.

*Commons Commission response:*

We agree with this recommendation.
Recommendation 39. The number of questions, speeches and interventions in both Houses should be measured by gender using data from the Official Report, in order to analyse whether members from one gender are disproportionately represented. In the light of the findings, consideration should then be given to possible steps that might be taken to ensure that any barriers to intervening are addressed, including the method by which parliamentarians indicate they want to speak.

Lords Commission response:
We support the audit’s conclusion that further data about the ability of all members to participate in the business of the House would be useful. We welcome the one-month trial conducted by Lords Hansard into gathering this data, and we look to the Procedure Committee to consider that data, the desirability of further data collection, and any possible steps that might be taken in the light of the results.

Commons Commission response:
We support the audit’s conclusion that further data about the ability of all members to participate in the business of the House would be useful but have not identified this as a priority for action at this time.

Recommendation 40. We welcome the progress that has been made in relation to increasing the number of artworks of and by women in the Parliamentary Art Collection, for example the New Dawn commission and the modern artwork in Portcullis House. However, we noted that the Palace of Westminster is a heritage building and, in our view, it is appropriate that the artwork hanging there reflects that fact.

Bicameral response
We join the audit panel in welcoming the progress that has been made to increase the number of artworks of and by women in the Parliamentary Art Collection. There are a range of opportunities across the parliamentary estate to continue this progress, including in new decant venues during Restoration and Renewal, and in the restored Palace of Westminster. We encourage the Lord Speaker’s Advisory Panel on Works of Art and the Speaker’s Works of Art Committee to continue to give due consideration to the case for further increasing the number of artworks of and by women.

Recommendation 44. Building on the good practice which was highlighted in our evidence base, select committees should make every possible effort to ensure that female witnesses and those from other diverse groups are not prevented from contributing to their inquiries, either by being overlooked in favour of the “usual suspects” or by being put off from putting themselves forward. We understand that the Lords Liaison Committee is expected to consider proposals on how Lords committees might monitor this more routinely: we support this.
Lords Commission response:

We endorse this recommendation and look forward to the outcome of the Liaison Committee’s detailed review of Lords committees, which will consider these issues.

Commons Commission response:

We endorse this recommendation and welcome the commitment from the Liaison Committee to witness diversity, and its renewed examination of the issue as part of its current inquiry into the effectiveness and impact of select committees.

Recommendation 45. To support parliamentarians to take account of gender impacts in their work, information should be made more readily available on the different groups or organisations in Parliament with specialist knowledge, brought together in one place and clearly signposted.

Bicameral response

We endorse this recommendation and have identified it as a priority for action by the House Administrations. More accessible information about the expertise that exists within Parliament and how to access it will support both members and staff to understand and recognise the gender impacts of Parliament’s work. We welcome the work of the Lords and Commons Libraries to identify and signpost the groups and organisations within Parliament that have this expertise.

Recommendation 46. Existing Continuous Professional Development options for MPs and peers should be publicised or expanded as appropriate to include, for example, unconscious bias, equality legislation and witness questioning techniques. Such provision could be different in the Commons and Lords.

Lords Commission response:

We accept that more could be done to promote the existing training opportunities available to peers and their staff, and we would ask the Lords Administration to consider ways in which the existing provision could be publicised further. As the audit report notes, the roles and responsibilities of MPs and peers are distinct, but where there is the possibility for the same or similar training to be made available to members of both Houses, we welcome this. We invite the Services Committee to consider what additional training might be useful to peers and their staff, except for training for members regarding committee work. We welcome the attention being given to this latter issue by the Lords Liaison Committee.

We also note the role of parties in providing training to parliamentarians, their staff, and party staff, and we welcome the work that has already been done by political parties to make such continuous professional development available.

Commons Commission response:

We note the Members’ Professional Development (MPD) offering in the House of Commons, which is demand-led and arranged under a series of themes: parliamentary skills, office essentials, developing expertise, representation and engagement and personal impact. We further note the
training in support of the new Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme and the “Good employer” standard, which are under development. We would encourage MPs to capitalise on the opportunities available and feed back if they do not meet their needs. We welcome the undertaking of the House Administration to consider methods to improve awareness of professional development opportunities, including advertising the them on the display screen in the Procedural Hub.

**Recommendation 47.** We were pleased to note from the data made available to us that there does not appear to be a gender barrier to delegation travel. However, we do consider that more could be done to make it easier for parents to participate.

**Bicameral response**

We welcome the finding that there does not appear to be a gender barrier to delegation travel by select committees, or by members to the three interparliamentary assemblies or with the four interparliamentary groups. We hope that the leaders of the UK delegations to the assemblies and groups will keep under review whether any further steps could be taken to make it easier for parents and those with other caring responsibilities to participate in international delegations. We also invite the Liaison Committees and Committee Offices in both Houses to consider balance and accessibility regarding committee travel.

**Recommendation 48.** New select committee travel guidelines should be introduced by the Liaison Committees of each House, with international organisations encouraged to do the same. Guidelines might include:

a. Restricting travel to weekdays where possible;
b. Restricting travel to parliamentary sitting time where possible (although we had differing views as to whether this would be helpful);
c. Introducing a provision whereby additional childcare costs incurred in the course of select committee travel may be claimed; and
d. Proactively promoting existing provisions from international assemblies or associations to assist with childcare.

**Lords Commission response:**

We note this recommendation. The Overseas Offices have drawn it to the attention of the four interparliamentary groups, as any new guidelines regarding group travel would ultimately be for their Executive Committees to develop and approve. They have also undertaken to ensure that any existing provisions to support delegation members with childcare are drawn to members’ attention.

Regarding select committee travel, we note that there are already a range of challenges in organising such travel around members’ other commitments and consider that the restrictions suggested in 48(a) and 48(b) are unlikely to be possible in every case. Nevertheless, we recognise the importance of ensuring that committee travel is accessible as possible. We are not aware of the issue raised in recommendation 48(c) having arisen regarding Lords committee travel.

**Commons Commission response:**
We note the view expressed by the Liaison Committee Steering Group that there should be a presumption against select committee travel outside Parliamentary sitting time and weekdays unless there is good reason. We welcome the commitment of the Liaison Committee to discuss proposed amendments to its guidance to reflect 48(c) at an upcoming meeting and inform us of the outcome.

**Recommendation 49.** We are aware that statistics about bullying and harassment of staff of the House of Commons or House of Lords are published from time to time in response to Freedom of Information requests, but, so far as we know, these statistics have not been broken down by gender. We ask the House Administrations to consider whether this might be possible in future, given that this information will presumably be available to those raising formal complaints through the new channels open to staff of both Houses.

*Bicameral response*

We agree with the audit panel that information about the gender of those affected by bullying and harassment could assist Parliament in understanding the nature of these issues. However, we note that it would be unusual for Parliament to introduce gender classifications into FOI responses in cases where that information is not being sought by the inquirer. We suggest that the six-month review of the Independent Complaints and Grievances Scheme should consider the desirability of recording and reporting gender data.

**Recommendation 50.** We welcome the initiatives undertaken by both Houses to improve the diversity of staff but note that the current pace of change to increase the number of women in senior positions in the House of Lords Administration in particular is unacceptable, including on the Management Board.

*Lords Commission response:*

We agree with the audit panel’s conclusion on this issue. We urge the Clerk of the Parliaments and the Lords Management Board to investigate why the profile of senior staff has been so slow to change and to make improvements.

**Recommendation 51.** In order to ensure that childcare commitments are not a barrier to career progression, the two Administrations should consider what more support should be provided, specifically for women returning to work from maternity leave, drawing on best practice from elsewhere.

*Bicameral response*

We endorse this recommendation. We note the Administrations’ existing Keeping in Touch policies and efforts to communicate with staff who are on extended periods of leave, including maternity leave, to ensure that they are aware of promotion and development opportunities. We
urge the Administrations to ensure that KIT is used effectively to help people maintain their skills and to support staged returns to work, in line with best practice, and we encourage the Administrations to develop guides for managers about how to support staff in using KIT.

*Additional Lords Commission response:*

We welcome the review of KIT from an inclusion perspective that is included in the House of Lords Focus on Inclusion Plan 2019-21.

*Recommendation 52. While we welcome the fact that opportunities for development are formally “gender-blind”, they should be advertised and awarded in a transparent manner so as to be genuinely open to all staff, regardless of their circumstances.*

*Bicameral response*

We endorse the audit’s recommendation. Opportunities for development should be readily available to all who want them, regardless of individual circumstances.