

Chapter 5: Safety, Health and Wellbeing

1. About this Chapter

1.1 This chapter sets out the roles and responsibilities in delivering health, safety and wellbeing in the House of Commons. It covers these key areas:

- Security. Responsibility for physical security rests with the [Parliamentary Security Department](#).
- Health and Wellbeing. The [Health and Wellbeing team](#) are responsible for health and wellbeing policies, including welfare, medical facilities, first aid, DSE assessments, protecting mothers, alcohol/drug use.
- Safety. The [Safety team](#) are responsible for the overarching Combined Safety Policy and its supplements related to accident reporting, risk assessment, hazardous substances and management of construction contractors.
- Fire safety. Guidance and advice about preventing and managing fire risk rests with the [Fire Safety Team](#).
- Manual handling.
- Working Time Regulations. These are the rules governing working hours for your health and safety.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

The House of Commons

2.1 All employers are required by law to provide a safe and healthy working environment for their staff. Although the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 are not legally binding on the House; the Commission has agreed to apply the Act as if it were binding.

2.2 The Clerk of the House is ultimately responsible for the health and safety of employees. As an employee of the House, you must follow the arrangements explained in the Combined Safety Policy and its supplements. Your own Team may have additional arrangements to cover any specific requirements. On a day-to-day level, responsibility for health and safety lies with the Managing Directors. They, in turn, appoint Safety Coordinators to help Managers in carrying out their responsibilities.

2.3 All Managers are responsible for managing health and safety within their areas of responsibility.

The health and safety policy may be found at the following Intranet link:

[Health and safety policy](#)

The House of Commons Health and Safety Committee

2.4 There is a Health and Safety Committee which regularly reviews the measures taken to ensure the health and safety of staff employed at the House:

[Health and safety committee](#)

Safety Representatives

2.5 The Trade Union Health and Safety Representatives, also known as Safety Representatives, have a formal role in various aspects of health and safety in the workplace.

2.6 The names of Trade Union Health and Safety Representatives can be obtained from the Branch Secretary of your trade union or from the Trade Union Side Administrator (TUSA) on ext. 5611.

3. Security

3.1 The Director of Security for Parliament is responsible for all aspects of security management and the oversight of security operations for both Houses of Parliament. This includes physical and personnel security and, working with the Parliamentary Digital Service, cyber security.

3.2 You should be vigilant in and around the Parliamentary Estate and report any concerns you have to a member of security staff. **In an emergency call x3333.**

3.3 The latest guidance and security updates may be found at the following Intranet link:

[Security](#)

4. Health and Wellbeing

Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service (PHWS)

PHWS are responsible for health and wellbeing policies; occupational health, wellbeing and medical services.

4.1 The management of both Houses recognise the importance of providing a healthy and safe working environment to help employees work to their full potential. PHWS offers specialist advice on all aspects of occupational health and wellbeing in the workplace.

4.2 The aim of the PHWS team is to provide a professional, independent, advisory service to management and staff, and to encourage a positive attitude to individual health and fitness. Occupational health services are provided in-house to directly employed staff of both Houses and PDS. The House has in place an [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (EAP) provided by Health Assured, which supports staff of both Houses and PDS with personal or work-related issues.

4.3 Information regarding the details of anyone's health or circumstances is confidential to the PHWS unless waived by express consent or contract with the client. The exception is if it includes information which represents a threat or a duty of care under Health and Safety.

4.4 The PHWS is located on the ground floor in Richmond House. For information or to make an appointment, call ext. 4014/0943 or email PHWS@parliament.uk.

4.5 The Clinical Nurse Adviser is located in the Lower Waiting Hall, Palace of Westminster and may be reached at ext. 5103.

Welfare

4.6 Employee Assistance Programme - An EAP is a confidential support service for employees and certain family members who live with them (limited to partner or spouse, and children aged 16-24 in full-time education). Our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is provided by Health Assured.

The EAP can help you with:

- financial issues including debt;
- family and relationship problems;
- legal and consumer issues;
- health and wellbeing information;
- stress at home or work;

Health Assured, can be accessed 24/7, 365 days a year for confidential help and support including:

- A Health e-hub app and online portal: a comprehensive library to help you get through life's challenges - username: House, password: Parliament.
- 24-hour helpline 0800 030 5182: share a problem with someone who listens with care before getting structured, actionable advice.
- Telephone counselling: you can work through problems with a therapist accredited by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)
- Face-to-face counselling sessions: you can speak with a local, qualified professional in a private and confidential setting.

4.7 If you are experiencing problems, irrespective of their nature, which may be affecting your work, we urge you to discuss these with your Line Manager and/or the Employee Assistance Provider (EAP) at an early stage, so you can be given appropriate advice and assistance before the matter becomes more serious. The EAP has access to a wide range of specialist help and information services. If you want to see a counsellor during working hours, it will be necessary to inform your Line Manager. You do not need to tell them the reason for your appointment.

Welfare loan

4.8 In emergencies, the Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service are service may be able to provide short-term financial support to staff which fulfils certain criteria. Payments from the fund are loans not gifts. Information is available from the PHWS on ext. 4014/0943 or at PHWS@parliament.uk.

Other organisations

4.9 Other societies and associations which provide services from which staff may benefit can be found in [Chapter 4 of the Staff Handbook](#).

Protecting new & expectant mothers

4.10 If you let your Line Manager know you are pregnant, they must review any risk assessments to identify any changes that are necessary to protect your health and that of your unborn baby. Arrangements for a risk assessment may be found at the following Intranet link:

[Risk Assessment - Maternity](#)

4.11 If you have any concerns after completing the risk assessment, you should contact the PHWS team on ext. 1484 for guidance.

Work Station Risk Assessment

4.12 The House of Commons Service aims to reduce risks of using display screen equipment. Everyone who works with display screen equipment (DSE) should read the relevant PHWS web pages, which contain information about ergonomics/ environment, posture, eyesight tests and work patterns and explain how DSE work station risk assessments should be completed

Eyesight tests

4.13 If you operate display screen equipment you are entitled to an eyesight test from a qualified optometrist. If the optometrist recommends glasses for DSE use or with a special prescription for DSE use, the House will cover the cost of a basic frame and lenses. If you do not follow the correct procedures, the House will not meet the costs of any eyesight tests or glasses or reimburse you for any costs incurred.

4.14 The PWHS web pages concerning display screen equipment may be found at the following Intranet link:

[DSE workstation risk assessment](#)

DSE user awareness training

4.15 DSE user awareness training is compulsory for all users. Details of training may be found at the following Intranet link:

[Health and safety training](#)

Smoking policy

4.16 The PHWS provide advice and guidance to help people to stop smoking. If you would like help to stop smoking please contact the Clinical Nurse Adviser in the Lower Waiting Hall on ext. 5103 or email PHWS@parliament.uk. Alternatively, the NHS offers a range of free services to help smokers give up. Further information is available at: [Smokefree NHS](#).

For all staff safety, smoking is not permitted on the Parliamentary Estate except in the following designated areas:

- The Terrace
- North Terrace (between Portcullis House and Norman Shaw South)
- Smoking shelter outside Richmond House

4.17 Smoking in a no smoking area (on either the Commons or Lords estate) could lead to disciplinary action.

E-cigarettes

4.18 The use of electronic cigarettes (“e-cigarettes”) is prohibited across the Parliament Estate except for designated outdoor areas:

- The House of Commons Administration has designated an area in Star Chamber Court for the use of e-cigarettes.
- The House of Lords Administration has designated a portion of State Officer's Court for the use of e-cigarettes.

4.19 You can use e-cigarettes in existing designated smoking areas if you wish. They may not be used in any other part of the Parliamentary estate. Using e-cigarettes in a non-designated area (on either the Commons or Lords estate) could lead to disciplinary action.

Alcohol and drug misuse

4.20 The House Service’s policy is that:

- **It is the duty of all staff** to ensure that the use or misuse of alcohol does not affect their performance and/or behaviour whilst at work. It is recommended that staff should avoid the consumption of alcohol during the working day.
- **It is the duty of managers to** ensure that any member of staff who tells them that alcohol is becoming a problem receives the medical and occupational support they need.

4.21 A line manager who reasonably believes that a member of staff’s performance and/or behaviour has been affected by the consumption of alcohol must deal with the issue. This should start with early consideration of an occupational health referral/intervention and may - as a last resort - include the use of informal and/or formal disciplinary, attendance or performance procedures

4.22 Staff who carry out work which may have a direct impact on health and safety, including the use of hazardous substances, equipment, or driving vehicles, may not drink at all during the working day (including meal and any other breaks), or be under the influence of alcohol while on duty.

4.23 These principles also apply to support those affected by drug misuse.

4.24 The possession or taking of illegal drugs during working hours will be viewed as a serious disciplinary matter. The buying, selling or distribution of drugs is not only a serious disciplinary matter but a criminal offence and, without exception, will be reported to the authorities.

4.25 The full policy on Managing Alcohol Consumption at Work is available from your Line Manager, or is on the Intranet at:

[Managing Alcohol Consumption at Work Policy](#)

Workplace stress and wellbeing policy

4.26 The House is committed to safeguarding the wellbeing of its staff and ensuring that appropriate measures are in place to identify, reduce and manage potential workplace stressors and provide a healthy working environment.

The Work-Related Stress policy, standards and guidance can be found in the Health and Wellbeing Policy and Guidance Section.

[Managers and Employees Guide - Stress Policy & Guidance](#)

5. Medical Facilities and First Aid

5.1 In the event of serious accident or illness, or if an ambulance is required, call Security Control on ext. 3333. They will make the necessary arrangements for an ambulance to be called, met at a nominated gate and escorted to the scene.

5.2 First aid is provided by staff, including some police and security officers, who hold current first aid certificates. All trained first aiders have access to first aid facilities and equipment. If you would like to become a qualified first aider, please contact the Governance Office on ext. 1707. Information about first aid allowances, responsibilities, and names of first aiders are listed at the following Intranet link:

[Parliamentary Safety Team](#)

Medical room/ Clinical Nurse Adviser and first aid rooms

5.3 A medical room staffed by a Clinical Nurse Adviser

can be found in the Lower Waiting Hall, off the Central Lobby, Palace of Westminster. You may reach the medical room on ext. 5103 and opening times are posted on the door or can be found on the PHWS intranet pages. You may also email PHWS@parliament.uk for more information.

A list of first aid rooms may be found at the following Intranet link:

[First Aid](#)

More information is available on the [Health and Wellbeing Intranet pages](#).

6. Safety

Parliamentary Safety Team

6.1 Safety legislation requires employers to have access to competent (safety) persons. The bicameral Parliamentary Safety Team (PST) fulfils this role within Parliament

6.2 The safety advisers in PST provide central health and safety support services to the Commons, Lords and Digital Service. The team consists of qualified and experienced safety advisers and collectively they are responsible for:

- Advising the Parliamentary Safety Assurance Committee on the strategic direction and approach for safety within Parliament;
- Evaluating Parliament's overall safety performance as part of the internal assurance process;
- Supporting the investigation of serious incidents that occur on the Parliamentary estate;
- Facilitating proportionate and effective safety risk management across Parliament;
- Evaluating Parliament's overall safety performance as part of the internal audit process;
- Liaising with the enforcing authorities;
- Developing safety policy and guidance;
- Supporting the professional development of safety coordinators;
- Contributing to the centrally provided safety training portfolio; and
- Providing professional advice on a range of work-related activities.

Any member of staff may seek safety advice and support directly from PST.

Risk assessments

6.3 General workplace risk assessments of each Team's activities should be carried out on a periodic basis. It is a management responsibility to ensure that these assessments are undertaken and that appropriate control measures are identified and put into place. Trade Union Health and Safety Representatives have the right to be involved in risk assessments and are informed of the results. Specialist advisers are also involved if the Team considers it necessary.

6.4 General guidance and access to all risk assessments may be found at the following Intranet link:

[Risk assessment](#)

Hazardous substances policy

6.5 It is important that the use and handling of potentially hazardous substances is properly controlled to minimise any risk to employee health and safety.

6.6 House policy, standards and guidance are contained within the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Policy documents and guidance. It is available from your Line Manager or may be found at the following Intranet link:

[Safety Risk Control Arrangements](#)

Personal protective equipment

6.7 Personal protective equipment describes all clothes and equipment that are provided to be worn or held by an employee so as to protect them from one or more risks to their health and safety, e.g. safety helmets, gloves, eye protection, high visibility clothing, safety footwear, safety harnesses, etc. If your job requires you to wear personal protective equipment, the House must supply it, free of charge, and it is the individual's responsibility to wear it.

Asbestos policy

6.8 All areas in the parliamentary estate containing asbestos are regularly examined. A report on this inspection is recorded in an asbestos register, which is held by the Maintenance Team, In-House Services. This register is available for inspection.

6.9 The presence of asbestos within a building does not necessarily mean the occupants are at risk. Asbestos only becomes a problem when it is disturbed or damaged in a way that allows fibres to get into the air. The Maintenance Team operates safe and effective asbestos management procedures, using licensed contractors, to ensure that risks are minimised during any operation to remove asbestos.

6.10 If you believe you may have been placed at risk, you should to speak with your Line Manager right away. Your Line Manager will report your concerns to Maintenance, In-House Services on ext. 4747 and arrange for a note of your concerns to be placed on your personal file by your HR Adviser. You may also wish to let PHWS know of your concerns. You may reach PHWS on ext. 4014 or at PHWS@parliament.uk.

[Safety Risk Control Arrangements](#)

Food hygiene regulations

6.11 Food hygiene regulations are covered by the food safety policy. Everyone involved with the handling of food should become familiar with this policy, which is available from Catering Services.

Accidents/incidents at work

6.12 Any accident on the parliamentary estate must be reported via the dedicated Intranet reporting web pages. If you do not have access to the Intranet, your Line Manager should report the incident on your behalf.

6.13 The incident report form should be completed as soon as possible. This can be done by anyone who is aware of the event, e.g. first aider, Health and Safety Coordinator or injured employee. Once your Line Manager is aware of the event they should investigate the circumstances to make sure that the causes are identified, and the appropriate actions required to avoid a repetition. In most cases this is straight forward and no special training is required. The Parliamentary Safety Team review all accident reports and they may assist or take the lead in investigations which are not straightforward or where there may be serious repercussions.

More detail may be found at the following Intranet link:

[Accident Reporting](#)

Safeguarding

6.14 The House of Commons takes seriously its responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults, both during visits to the Parliamentary Estate, and when staff engage with them in the community. The House is committed to providing a safe environment and ensuring that it can confidently and competently fulfil its safeguarding responsibilities. Further details may be found in [chapter 3](#) and the following Intranet link:

[Safeguarding](#)

Accidents/incidents outside work

6.15 If you are absent from work because of an injury you did not sustain in the course of your employment, where appropriate the House may:

- require you to make a specific loss of earnings claim from the third party responsible for the injury
- provide an advance of salary in place of any sick pay or other pay due to you
- require you to repay proportionately any advance of salary where the claim for loss of earnings is wholly or partly successful
- ensure that where all or part of the advance is repaid, a period representing the repaid advance does not reckon towards the limits of the House sickness absence scheme

6.16 Further details may be found at the following Intranet link:

[Accident Reporting and Investigation](#)

7. Fire Safety

Fire Safety Committee

7.1 This committee is chaired by Director of Facilities (House of Lords). The full membership and Terms of Reference for the Committee may be found at the following Intranet link:

[Fire Safety Committee](#)

Fire Evacuation Marshals

7.2 Fire Evacuation Marshals are members of staff who are trained by the Fire Risk Management Team to assist with the full evacuation of all premises on the parliamentary estate. All staff with caretaking responsibilities for visitors and staff will be trained as Fire Evacuation Marshals. For those staff who do not have caretaking responsibilities volunteers will be sought. If insufficient volunteers come forward, the most senior member of staff in the particular area will take on the role of Fire Evacuation Marshal.

Fire safety procedure

7.3 When you join the House or move to a new work area, you should make yourself aware of the emergency escape routes. Mandatory fire safety awareness training covers these points. Make sure you complete the course on Act.

7.4 If you are likely to have difficulties in evacuating a building due to a permanent or temporary disability, please speak to your Line Manager and Safety Co-ordinator about developing a personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) (x8451) or email fire@parliament.uk

7.5 Further information about fire safety may be found at the following Intranet link:

[Fire advice & procedures](#)

8. Manual handling

8.1 Lifting and carrying of heavy or awkward objects can be hazardous and, if done in an unsafe or uncontrolled manner, may result in ill health, particularly back pain. The House is committed to reducing the risk of such manual handling activities through risk assessment and implementation of sensible risk control measures.

8.2 House policy, standards and guidance are contained within the Manual Handling Policy and Guidance document. It is available from your Line Manager or may be found at the following Intranet link:

[Safety Risk Control Arrangements](#)

9. Working Time Regulations

9.1 The Working Time Regulations aim to help safeguard the health and safety of people at work. Under the Working Time Regulations, you are entitled to:

- An average working week of no more than 48 hours. This will be averaged over a 26 week period beginning on 1 November or 1 May. Although the regulations provide for workers to agree in writing to opt out of the 48-hour limit, the management of the House will not ask or require its staff to exceed the 48-hour average.
- At least a 24-hour weekly rest period
- At least a 20-minute daily rest break if you work more than six hours
- An 11-hour daily break between spells of duty. This may be varied by agreement.

- 28 days paid annual leave if you work a full-time 5-day week including 8 bank holidays (pro rata for part-time staff).

Daily breaks

9.2 Managers will use their best endeavours to provide an 11-hour break between working days. Except in emergencies (which will include unexpected sittings of the House after midnight), each member of staff will receive a daily break of eight hours minimum.

9.3 When calculating the length of your daily break, the clock will start running 30 minutes after the rise of the House, or immediately after the end of your working hours as specified in your contract or job description, if this would be later.

Night workers

9.4 You are a night worker if your daily work in the House includes at least three hours between 11 pm and 6 am either on the majority of the days you work or on a regular basis such as a rotating shift pattern.

If you are a night worker you:

- must not work more than an average of eight hours in any 24-hour period unless you have agreed to do this
- must not work more than eight hours in any 24 hours if your work involves special hazards or heavy physical or mental strain
- will be offered a free health assessment before beginning night work and at intervals thereafter
- may transfer to other duties if you suffer from health problems connected with night work
- must have access to appropriate health and safety facilities

Young workers (under 18)

9.5 Special daily, weekly and night time work limits apply to young workers. You are a young worker if you are aged at least 15 but under 18.

If you are a young worker, you may not ordinarily work more than:

- eight hours a day, or
- 40 hours a week.

9.6 These hours worked cannot be averaged out and there is no opt-out available. However, you may work longer hours where this is necessary to either:

- maintain continuity of service, or
- respond to a surge in demand for service

The above is provided that:

- there is no adult available to perform the task, and
- your Line Manager ensures that your training needs are not adversely affected

9.7 Your entitlement to rest breaks is as follows:

- a 30-minute rest break when working more than 4½ hours
- an uninterrupted period of 12 hours rest in each 24-hour period in which you work
- Two days' rest each week. This cannot be averaged over a 14-day period, but it may be reduced to 36 hours for technical and organisational reasons.

9.8 Your entitlement to breaks can be changed only in exceptional circumstances. Where this occurs, you should receive compensatory rest within three weeks. In addition to the above, you may not ordinarily work at night between 10 pm and 6 am, or between 11 pm and 7 am. However, in specific circumstances and in certain work sectors (for example catering, retail, postal and newspaper deliveries, etc.) certain exemptions apply. For further information, please contact your HR Adviser.

Procedure for dealing with concerns regarding the Working Time Regulations

9.9 If you feel that you are exceeding limits on your working hours or are not getting the breaks and rest periods to which you are entitled, then speak to your Line Manager. You may also consult the relevant Trade Union Representatives. Details are available from the TUSA on ext. 5611. If you are still not satisfied, you should approach your Countersigning Manager. After this it is open to you to bring a grievance using the grievance procedures in Chapter 21.

Staff with other jobs

9.10 If you have another job or are considering taking on any additional work with another employer you must let your Line Manager know. They may refuse permission for you to take or continue with the second job if it is felt the additional hours are (or would be) excessive and detrimental to your ability to undertake your responsibilities at the House effectively and /or there could be any conflict of interest. More information about conflicts of interest is held in [Chapter 18](#). If your Line Manager feels the additional hours are not (or would not be) excessive but is concerned they may approach or exceed the 48-hour average working week, then you will be asked to sign a waiver form.

The waiver form may be found may be may be found at the following Intranet link:

[Letters and report forms](#)

[Return to the Staff Handbook](#)