

Management Board

Staff Accommodation: towards an Accommodation Strategy

Paper from the Director General, Facilities

Purpose

1. This paper proposes how the Board might take initial steps towards the formulation of a House of Commons accommodation strategy.

Conclusions and decisions

2. **This paper asks the Board to approve proposals for a “zero-based” accommodation review to be completed by the Summer recess, beginning with a questionnaire to Departments to establish business need.**
3. **It outlines one further option, in addition to using Derby Gate, for replacing Member accommodation in the Upper Committee Corridor / Lower Secretarial Floor and asks the Board whether it wishes further work to be undertaken to develop this.**

Background

4. At its meeting on 17 January, the Board considered a paper from the Director General, Facilities on future accommodation of House staff. The Board wished to consider wider options than the limited feasibility studies suggested and agreed to commission a study to establish criteria as to which groups of staff should be based where across the whole Commons Estate. The Board was unwilling to make tactical decisions in response to the Administration Committee's recommendations without establishing its overall accommodation priorities.

Accommodation Review

5. Instead of commissioning another in-depth study from consultants, it is proposed that a relatively rapid and high-level review be conducted in-house by the Head of Accommodation Services, with a view to presenting proposals to the Board before the Summer recess.
6. For the purposes of this review, it is proposed that certain assumptions should be made:
 - all House staff should be located in the Westminster area
 - House staff numbers will remain roughly the same
 - no increase in the size of the Estate.

It is proposed that the review should be “zero-based”: it should not start from the basis of current locations (though moving everyone around is, clearly, unlikely to be a cost-effective outcome). And – to avoid defensive positions being taken – it should be approached from the angle of defining a department’s business needs for accommodating its sections and not from the starting point of their current location. **Is this approach acceptable to the Board?**

Longer-term Accommodation Strategy

7. For the longer-term, the Board may have appetite to consider more radical options, including relocation of staff away from Westminster, outsourcing of services etc. And it will need to ensure that its long-term Estates strategy is consistent with its accommodation needs. The Board may wish to return to this once the results of the review are available.

Questionnaire to Departments

8. As a first step, it is proposed that Departments be asked to respond to a series of questions to define their needs and business priorities.
9. The questions would be broadly as follows:
 - Please provide a breakdown of the Department by sections. Indicate which (if any) need to be located together (and why).
 - Which sections (if any) have to be in a specific location (and why)?
 - What constraints (eg requirement for security, proximity to storage etc) (if any) apply?
 - Is there a business need for any particular type of accommodation (eg cellular, as opposed to open-plan) (and why)?
 - Which sections need to be near Members? How near (and why)?
 - Which sections need to be near other customers and where are those customers based?
 - Do sections of your Department need to be located with sections of other Departments? Why?
 - What changes in your accommodation would improve service delivery?
 - What would be the impact on your service delivery if a section’s accommodation requirements could not be met?
 - What changes can you envisage in the next five years or longer which would change your need for accommodation?

Does the Board approve this approach?

10. If the Board is content, it will be important to ensure that Departments respond to these questions in a spirit of openness and cooperation. Directors General will need to communicate this to their Department.
11. Once Departments have responded, it is proposed that the Head of Accommodation Services develop options for the future location of staff units in the light of Departments’ priorities. It is envisaged that this will

require a process of discussion with Directors General, and where necessary friendly challenge, before a paper is presented to the Board before the Summer recess.

Feasibility studies

12. Meanwhile, work is underway to complete the feasibility studies required by the Administration Committee:

- remodelling offices on the **Upper Committee Corridor** to get rid of the windowless offices
- the use of the Lower Secretaries Floor as the location for an **Education facility**
- the refurbishment of **Derby Gate** to provide office accommodation for Members in place of the Upper Committee Corridor and Lower Secretaries Floor offices.

These studies will need to be presented to the Administration Committee soon after Easter.

13. Derby Gate is not the only option for providing alternative accommodation for Members, though other options all have significant disadvantages:

- **Canon Row**: could be used as Members' accommodation following refurbishment. This approach has significant issues in terms of the increased time taken to deliver the programme and its complexity (particularly given the need to relocate the Security Control Room). In addition, this would only provide space for approximately 30 Members and 15 Members' staff. It would still be necessary to find the balance of accommodation (say 25 Members and 15 Members' staff) by moving staff of the House out of their current accommodation in the Palace and the Norman Shaw Buildings.
- **Tothill Street, 2 The Abbey Garden or 4 and 7 Millbank**: locating Members' offices off the secure Estate has been ruled out by the Commission. This accommodation might, however, be used for Members' staff or short term Member decant.

Does the Board wish a feasibility study to be undertaken into Canon Row (or any other option) as an alternative to Derby Gate for replacement Members' accommodation?

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