

Management Board

Regular surveys of Members and their staff

Paper from the Head of the Office of the Chief Executive

1. Purpose

1.1. This paper asks the Board to agree how to take forward the recommendations in the Tebbit review that Members' satisfaction with services should be measured by a programme of more regular surveys of a proportion of Members and their staff (recommendations 16 and 54).

2. Conclusions and decisions

2.1. The Board is asked to agree that:

2.2. A programme of more regular surveys of Members and their staff should be implemented, with the intention of conducting the first of these surveys in the 2008–09 Parliamentary Session.

2.3. The focus of each individual survey should be to assist the Board in taking a strategic oversight of the performance of the House Service as a whole. Two key purposes should underlie each survey:

- Purpose 1: gathering a solid base of data over time, in order to inform measurement of cross-House performance management. This is likely to entail collecting recurring data in order to establish any patterns of change over time.
- Purpose 2: gathering more 'impressionistic' or one-off data, in order to enable the House Service to provide a more informed and timely response to specific difficulties or 'burning issues' as they arise.

2.4. The Administration Committee should be given the opportunity to comment on the Board's proposals. A proposed paper from the Board to the Administration Committee, informing it of the Board's proposals and seeking feedback, is set out at Annex A.

2.5. Once consultation with the Administration Committee has taken place, the survey programme should be put out to tender, jointly with the annual staff survey programme.

2.6. Professional survey companies responding to the invitation to tender should be asked to make specific proposals with regard to the following issues:

- the best way of designing a survey that meets the purposes agreed by the Board, including format issues such as length of questionnaire, methods of response and question design;
- the basis on which respondents should be selected for each survey, including sample size and respondents' other characteristics, bearing in mind potential political sensitivities;
- the frequency of surveys;
- if relevant, the length of the cycle of the overall survey programme, including a proposed means of accommodating a general election.

2.7. The Board's final decisions about the exact nature of the survey programme should be based on the proposals put forward by the professional survey companies tendering for the work.

A. Background

3. Tebbit review findings

3.1. The Tebbit review recommended that the House Service should adopt a performance management system "with clear criteria for achieving success", and that one such success criterion should be improved Members' satisfaction with services, measured by more regular 'rolling' surveys of a proportion of Members (recommendation 16). The review team envisaged that such surveys would be one means of measuring progress against improved service delivery standards. The review also recommended that these surveys should also seek the views of a representative cross-section of Members' staff (recommendation 54).¹

3.2. The House of Commons Commission, in its response to the Tebbit review, accepted recommendations 16 and 54 and stated that the Administration Committee would be consulted in early 2008 on a proposal to introduce a rolling survey of Members and their staff.

¹ See paragraphs 100 to 107 and 261 to 264.

4. House surveys to date

- 4.1. A survey of user satisfaction with services offered by the House Service has been conducted midway through each of the last three parliaments, in 1999, 2003 and 2007. All Members and their staff were invited to respond to each of these surveys. Further information is set out in Annex B.
- 4.2. Separate surveys of all House staff were conducted in 2006 and 2007. In July 2007, the Board agreed that all House staff should be surveyed on an annual basis. The Department of Resources is currently overseeing plans to undertake a further staff survey in June/July 2008. Further information is set out in paragraph 9 and in Annex B.

5. Other mechanisms for measuring user satisfaction

- 5.1. In addition to the once-a-parliament survey, a wide range of other mechanisms are in place that seek to measure user satisfaction with services within the House. In December 2007, a Services Information Group (SIG) sub-group presented a paper to SIG on gauging Member satisfaction. The paper concluded that there was considerable scope for better co-ordination and a more coherent House-wide approach to gauging Member satisfaction. It indicated that the wide range of mechanisms currently in place for measuring user satisfaction across the House, in addition to the once-a-Parliament survey and the staff survey, have tended to be implemented and administered by individual departments and to focus on a specific category of services, and that there has been little or no central oversight or co-ordination of the feedback mechanisms used by individual departments.
- 5.2. The Office of the Chief Executive intends that SIG's findings will be the subject of further recommendations to the Board about standardising and streamlining feedback mechanisms currently in use across the House.

B. Implementing a programme of regular surveys

6. Purpose

6.1. The key question for the Board to consider is what information it wants to obtain from a programme of regular surveys, in order to enable it better to measure the House Service's performance. **The focus of each individual survey should be to assist the Board in taking a strategic oversight of the performance of the House Service as a whole. Two key purposes should underlie each survey:**

- Purpose 1: gathering a solid base of data over time, in order to inform measurement of cross-House performance management. This is likely to entail collecting recurring data in order to establish any patterns of change over time.
- Purpose 2: gathering more 'impressionistic' or one-off data, in order to enable the House Service to provide a more informed and timely response to specific difficulties or 'burning issues' as they arise.

7. [s.44]

8. Procurement

8.1. Following the 2007 staff survey, the Board acknowledged that, before another staff survey could be conducted, procurement rules required that a fresh tender exercise be undertaken to select a supplier. This exercise is now underway, sponsored by the Department of Resources, and is aiming to put in place arrangements for the 2008 staff survey only. Staff surveys beyond 2008 will therefore need to be the subject of a separate procurement process.

8.2. **For reasons of efficient procurement, the programme for surveying Members and their staff should be put out to tender jointly with the annual staff survey programme.** The procurement process would be conducted jointly between the Office of the Chief Executive and the Department of Resources. Procurement specialists in the Department of Resources have advised that a joint procurement process would be more cost-effective, and that a joint exercise would not preclude contracting separate companies to carry out the two survey programmes.

9. Survey design: factors to consider

9.1. The following questions are included to give the Board some sense of the scope of the proposed programme of regular surveys. Professional survey companies responding to the invitation to tender would be asked to formulate specific proposals in response to these questions.

Format

9.2. How can each survey best be designed in order to maximise response rate and lessen the risk of 'survey overload'? Issues include length of questionnaire, methods of response—paper-based, electronic and telephonic—and question design.

Population surveyed

9.3. Should each survey be sent to all Members and their staff, or to a sample of each group? Previous surveys of services were sent to all Members and their staff, but these surveys were conducted only once a Parliament.

9.4. If a sample-based approach were to be taken, what would be the minimum number of respondents to whom the survey would need to be sent in order to ensure that the data gathered was statistically reliable? As a very general indication of likely sample sizes, and on a purely numerical basis, the House of Commons Library has suggested that responses from a minimum of 150 Members would be required in order to produce results of which the Board could be confident to $\pm 5\%$ points. Assuming a 50% response rate, that would mean sending surveys to 300 Members. The number could be reduced slightly if the sample were 'stratified'—for example, by selecting respondents randomly but ensuring coverage of MPs by party is in proportion with their representation in the House of Commons.

Frequency

9.5. How frequently should surveys be conducted? For practical reasons, it would probably not be practical to run the surveys any more frequently than annually, because of the time taken to prepare the questions, process the responses and analyse the resulting data. Given the nature of the parliamentary year, it might be difficult to find appropriate times at which to conduct more than one annual survey.

9.6. If a sample-based approach were to be taken, is there a case for continuing the existing pattern of conducting a 'universal' survey of all Members and their staff once in each Parliament?

Length of cycle

9.7. If a sample-based approach were to be taken, should the survey programme be designed on some sort of cycle—whereby all Members and their staff would be surveyed at least once in the course of a cycle? The programme would need to be able to accommodate the situation where a general election is called mid-cycle.

Philippa Helme
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Annex A: Proposed paper to the Administration Committee

IMPLEMENTING A PROGRAMME OF REGULAR SURVEYS OF MEMBERS AND THEIR STAFF

Paper from the Management Board

1. At its meeting on [21 February 2008], the Management Board discussed how to take forward the recommendations in the Tebbit review that Members' satisfaction with services should be measured by a programme of more regular surveys of a proportion of Members and their staff (recommendations 16 and 54). In December 2007, the House of Commons Commission accepted recommendations 16 and 54 in the Tebbit review and stated that the Administration Committee would be consulted in early 2008 on a proposed survey programme.
2. This paper informs the Committee of the Board's proposals and seeks the Committee's feedback.

BACKGROUND

3. A survey of user satisfaction with services offered by the House Service has been conducted midway through each of the last three parliaments, in 1999, 2003 and 2007. In each case, surveys were sent to all Members and their staff.
4. The 2007 survey of services was overseen by a project board. The Committee nominated one of its members, Janet Anderson, to sit on the project board. In February 2006, the Committee was asked for its views on issues associated with the survey, including level of consultation and providing a pilot for the survey. In January 2007, the Committee had an opportunity to express its views on issues such as the length of the questionnaire and the time taken to complete it, distribution and value for money.
5. The 2007 survey was carried out in March 2007 and achieved an overall response rate of 52%—45% for Members and 54% for Members' staff. The feedback received was generally positive; follow-up work has subsequently been carried out to examine areas in which there was room for improvement. [A paper detailing the outcome of this follow-up work is also being considered by the Committee at today's meeting.]

THE BOARD'S PROPOSALS

6. The Board proposes that:

- a) A programme of more regular surveys of Members and their staff will be implemented, with the intention of conducting the first of these surveys in the 2008–09 Parliamentary Session.
- b) The focus of each individual survey should be to assist the Board in taking a strategic oversight of the performance of the House Service as a whole. Two key purposes should underlie each survey:
 - Purpose 1: gathering a solid base of data over time, in order to inform measurement of cross-House performance management. This is likely to entail collecting recurring data in order to establish any patterns of change over time.
 - Purpose 2: gathering more 'impressionistic' or one-off data, in order to enable the House Service to provide a more informed and timely response to specific difficulties or 'burning issues' as they arise.
- c) When the survey programme is put out to tender, professional survey companies responding to the invitation to tender will be asked to make specific proposals with regard to survey design, including format issues such as length of questionnaire, methods of response and question design, population surveyed and frequency of surveys. The Board's subsequent decisions about the exact nature of the survey programme would be based on the proposals put forward by the professional survey companies tendering for the work. The Board would undertake further consultation with the Committee prior to finalising its proposals.

COMMENTS SOUGHT

7. The Board would particularly welcome the Committee's initial comments on the following questions. The Committee's comments on these questions will be used to inform the brief issued to those professional survey companies tendering for the work.

Questions:

- a) Does the Committee agree that the survey programme should now be put out to tender, with professional survey companies asked to make specific proposals with regard to survey design?
- b) What were the most successful aspects of the 2007 survey of services, from Members' point of view?
- c) How regularly should Members and their staff be surveyed, bearing in mind the importance of maximising the response rate? For example, would it be appropriate to survey Members and their staff annually?
- d) Should each survey be sent to all Members and their staff, or to a sample of each group? Would the Committee support sampling a proportion of Members and their staff in each survey, on a rotating basis?
- e) If a sample-based approach were to be taken, would there be a case for continuing the existing pattern of conducting a 'universal' survey of all Members and their staff once in each Parliament?

Annex B: background to current House-wide surveys

10. 2007 survey of services

- 10.1. A survey of user satisfaction with services offered by the House Service has been conducted midway through each of the last three parliaments, in 1999, 2003 and 2007. All three surveys were sent to all Members and their staff; the 2003 survey was also sent to all House staff.
- 10.2. The 2007 survey was sent to 3,149 people. Respondents were asked to answer 47 questions, covering 12 sides of A4 paper; the questionnaire was designed to take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The survey achieved an overall response rate of 52%—45% for Members and 54% for Members' staff—and the feedback received was generally positive. The 2007 survey achieved significantly improved response rates as compared with the two earlier surveys. Staff involved in administering the survey postulate that this can be attributed to a deliberate effort to maximise response rates, by way of telephone and email reminders and a programme of internal publicity.

11. Annual staff surveys

- 11.1. Following the inclusion of House staff in the 2003 survey of services, the Board agreed that House staff should not be included in this survey in future but should be surveyed separately. Separate surveys of staff were conducted in April 2006 and April/May 2007 with the aim of providing an indication of staff satisfaction and informing future management actions. In July 2007, the Board agreed that all House staff should be surveyed on an annual basis.
- 11.2. The Department of Resources is currently overseeing plans to undertake a further staff survey in June/July 2008. Departments will be consulted about which areas they would like covered in the staff survey, with the aim of ensuring that individual departments do not conduct staff surveys separate from the universal annual survey. The intention is that future staff surveys will be benchmarked against each other and external organisations.