



House of Commons
Administration Committee

House of Commons Accommodation

Third Report of Session 2005–06



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Accommodation**

Third Report of Session 2005–06

*Report, together with formal minutes, oral and
written evidence*

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The Administration Committee

The Administration Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider the services provided for and by the House and to make recommendations thereon to the House of Commons Commission or to the Speaker.

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The late Mr Eric Forth MP (*Conservative, Bromley & Chiselhurst*)

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Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee are on the Internet and can be accessed via www.parliament.uk/ac

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Steven Mark and Nerys Welfoot (Clerks), Ameet Chudasama (Chief Office Clerk) and Jane Lauder (Secretary).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Administration Committee, Committee Office (Palace of Westminster), House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 2471; the Committee's email address is ac@parliament.uk

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Summary

The Palace of Westminster has for many years been unable to meet the reasonable aspirations of Members of Parliament for office accommodation. In response to this situation, a secure and coherent Estate has been created, extending beyond the Palace to the north of Bridge Street. Almost all Members now have at least one room of their own, and many are clearly able to work comfortably within the offices they have been allocated. But expectations continue to exceed the supply of available space; and some Members remain housed in rooms which are frankly inadequate. Pressure from Members for additional space over the decades has coincided with substantial increases in the numbers of staff of the House, who also need to be provided with a working environment of reasonable quality.

The accommodation needs of Members' staff at Westminster are uncertain because their numbers depend on individual Members' preferences and circumstances. Failure to meet expectations is as much of a problem as the reality of the accommodation available; so too is failure to establish an attractive alternative for Members to basing their staff at Westminster, by providing reliable facilities for remote working.

In this Report, we describe the current situation in terms of buildings, numbers of occupants, allocation processes and existing strategy (*Part Two*); we assess the accommodation needs of the main occupant groups and the extent to which these are currently met (*Part Three*); we describe the constraints by which the provision of accommodation is bound (*Part Four*); and finally, we set out our proposals for improving the current provision on a strategic basis (*Part Five*).

Our proposals focus on devising a long-term accommodation strategy, refurbishing sub-standard accommodation, improving Information and Communications Technology, particularly access from the constituency, furnishing offices according to a standard which meets the needs of Members, and better managing demand for accommodation, particularly for Members' staff.

1 Introduction

1. The last inquiry by a Committee of the House into the accommodation provided on the Parliamentary Estate was conducted more than 15 years ago, and focussed on the construction of Portcullis House.¹ We decided soon after we were appointed by the House that the time was right to conduct a thorough review of accommodation, given the continuing pressures on the Estate and the fact that some office accommodation remains of an unacceptably low standard, both for Members of Parliament and for other occupants of the Estate. We were also aware of a lack of clarity about the standards of accommodation to be expected by Members and other occupants of the Estate, and about how space on the Estate is used and allocated.

2. The purpose of the House of Commons Administration is to provide facilities for the elected representatives of the British people to meet, deliberate and legislate, to control the executive and the raising and spending of taxes, and to secure the redress of grievances. Members of Parliament should be provided with the means of carrying out these demanding tasks in the modern world, including adequate accommodation and communications facilities.

3. We focus unapologetically in this Report on the rights and needs of Members of Parliament, in whose interests the House has appointed us to act. As we will show, the accommodation available for Members has improved dramatically in recent years with the expansion of the Parliamentary Estate into new and refurbished buildings to the north of Bridge Street. Many Members now have adequate office accommodation at Westminster—but some still do not. We examine why this is the case, and we assess the scope for improving both the extent and the quality of the accommodation available. We acknowledge that accommodation is a limited resource, and we suggest ways in which this resource could be used more efficiently. The numbers of staff of the House and Members' staff have grown significantly in recent years: they also have a right to expect decent accommodation, and we consider the extent to which this accommodation can be provided at Westminster without infringing on the justified expectations of Members.

¹ Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), Second Report of Session 1990–91, *New Parliamentary Building (Phase 2): The Initial Brief*, HC 551

4. We announced our inquiry on 20 January 2006 with terms of reference as follows:

- a) To assess the existing standards for the office accommodation of Members and their staff, and for other occupants of the Parliamentary Estate.
- b) To assess whether the accommodation available on the Estate is currently appropriately allocated.
- c) To examine ways of improving the use of existing space.
- d) To assess, in the light of the above, whether the needs of the occupants of the Estate, and Members in particular, can be met within the existing buildings, or whether a further expansion of the Estate will be required to meet reasonable demand.
- e) To suggest how future demand for office accommodation might be managed.

5. In response to our announcement we received written submissions from 29 Members, nine Members' staff and two staff of the House, and further written evidence from the Board of Management and from representatives of various groups of occupants on the Estate. We heard evidence in private from current and former Accommodation Whips, from senior staff of the House, and from representatives of some of the main groups of occupants of the Estate: Members' staff, staff of the House and the Press. We are publishing the majority of this evidence. We have seen for ourselves a cross-section of Members' accommodation in the Palace and in the northern part of the Estate as well as some offices occupied by staff of the House and have spoken to the people working there. The Serjeant at Arms has provided us with plans of the Estate and statistical information. We are grateful to all those who have helped us in our inquiry.

6. In part two of this Report, we set out a factual overview of the buildings currently occupied by the House of Commons and a description of how this space is allocated, followed by a brief history of the events that have led to the current situation. In part three, we assess the accommodation needs of the main occupant groups and the extent to which these are currently met. In part four, we describe the constraints which affect the accommodation available and how it is allocated. Finally, in part five we set out our proposals.

2 Facts, figures and a brief history

The current Estate

7. The House of Commons part of the Parliamentary Estate consists of seven owned buildings within a secure perimeter (including approximately 60 per cent of the Palace of Westminster), and two leased buildings outside the secure perimeter. The buildings with their names are shown on the map on the next page. In addition, the House has a short-term lease on part of a tenth building (4 Millbank) which is currently being used for decant accommodation.

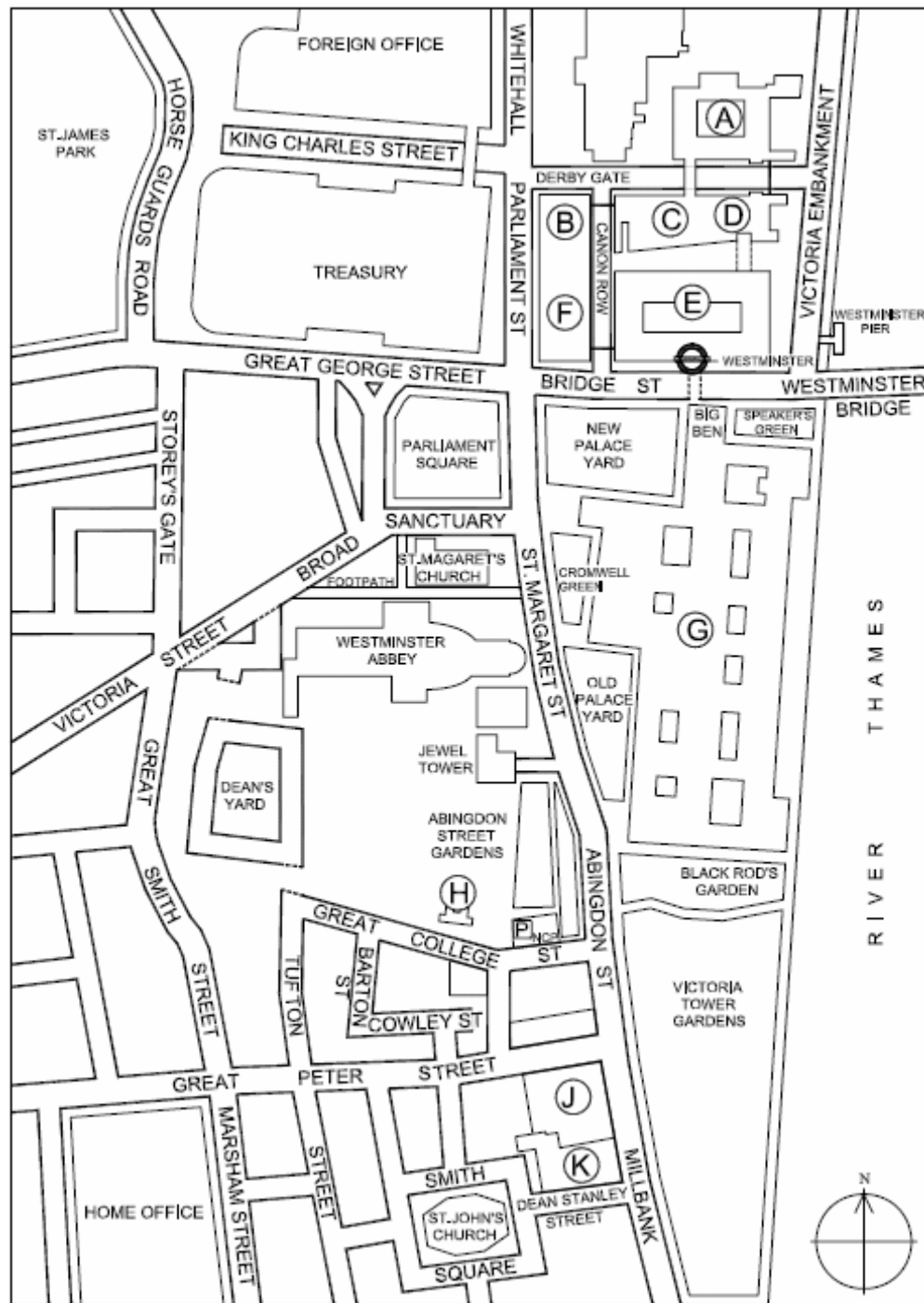
8. Of the 116,000 sq m on the House of Commons part of the Parliamentary Estate, 60,300 sq m is usable space which can be assigned to occupant groups; of this, 37,500 sq m is office accommodation.² Different buildings on the Estate have different ratios of usable to unusable space: the Palace is particularly space-inefficient in this respect.³ Usable space not set aside for office accommodation is used in a number of different ways: some of the most important are for the Chamber, Committee and meeting rooms, for kitchens and storage, for Library space, and for dining and café areas.⁴

2 Ev 48, paras 5 and 6. Space which is 'unusable' includes hallways, lobbies, corridors, plant rooms, stairs and lifts.

3 Ev 49, para 7

4 Ev 48, Figure 3

Figure 1: Plan of the House of Commons and its outbuildings



Key

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------|----|-----------------------|
| A: | Norman Shaw North | F: | 1 Parliament Street |
| B: | 1 Derby Gate | G: | Palace of Westminster |
| C: | 1 Canon Row | H: | 2 The Abbey Garden |
| D: | Norman Shaw South | J: | 4 Millbank |
| E: | Portcullis House | K: | 7 Millbank |

9. Of the office accommodation, Members (646) occupy 25 per cent and Members' staff (estimated at 1,230) occupy another 30 per cent. Staff of the House (1,735) occupy 35 per cent. The remaining 10 per cent of office space is occupied by third parties such as the Press Gallery and security personnel (916 in total).⁵ The following charts (Figures 2 and 3) illustrate this graphically. The densities shown are notional rather than real for staff of the House and third-party occupants as not all are desk-based. 1,257 staff of the House are desk-based, giving a more accurate density figure of 10.5 sq metres per person.

Figure 2: Proportion of office area by occupant group

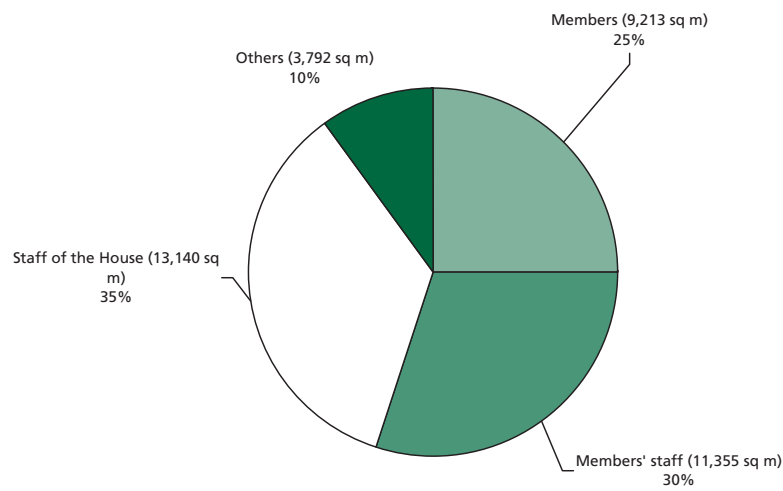
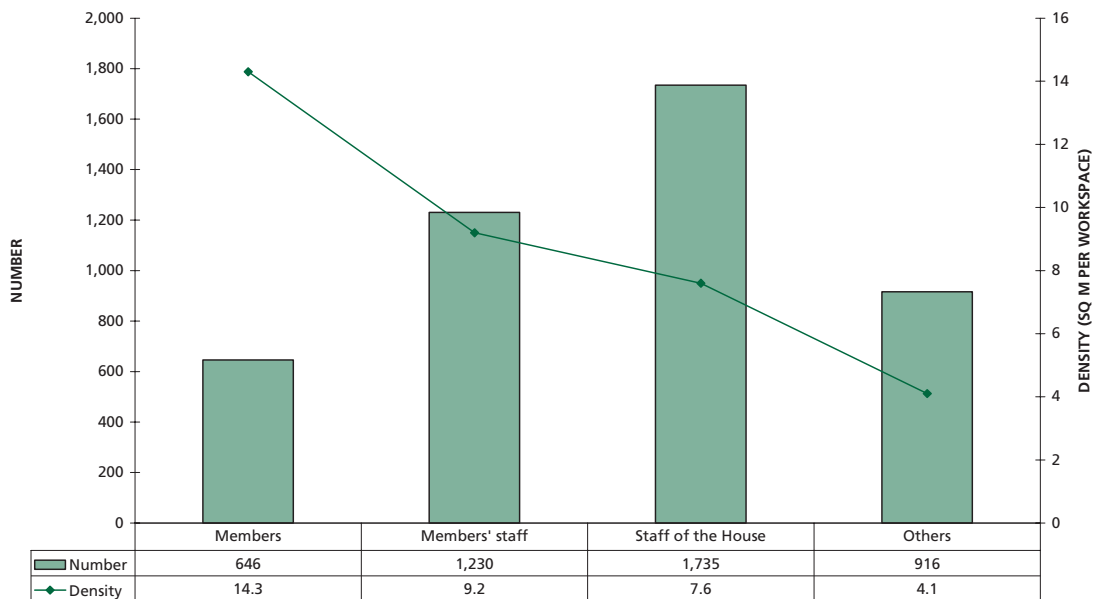


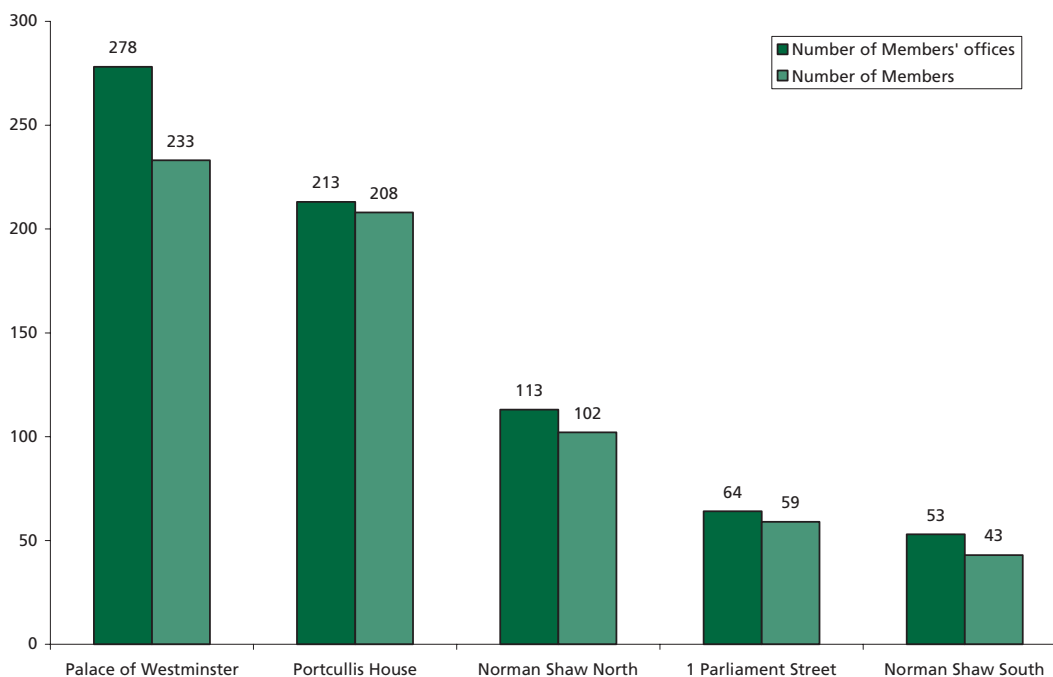
Figure 3: Number of occupants by category, and density of occupation of office space



⁵ Ev 48–54. All statistics on occupancy represent a snapshot at a given moment in time and are likely to have changed slightly by the time this Report is published.

10. Members and their staff are based in five of the nine buildings on the Estate, all within the secure perimeter. The chart below (Figure 4) shows the number of Members’ offices available in each of these five buildings (721 in total), and the number of Members actually located in each building (645 in total, excluding the Speaker).⁶

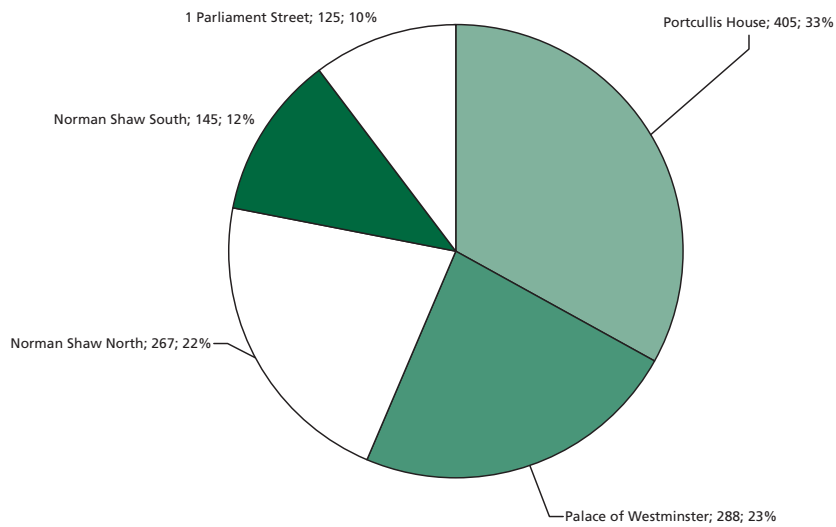
Figure 4: Numbers of Members and Members’ offices by building



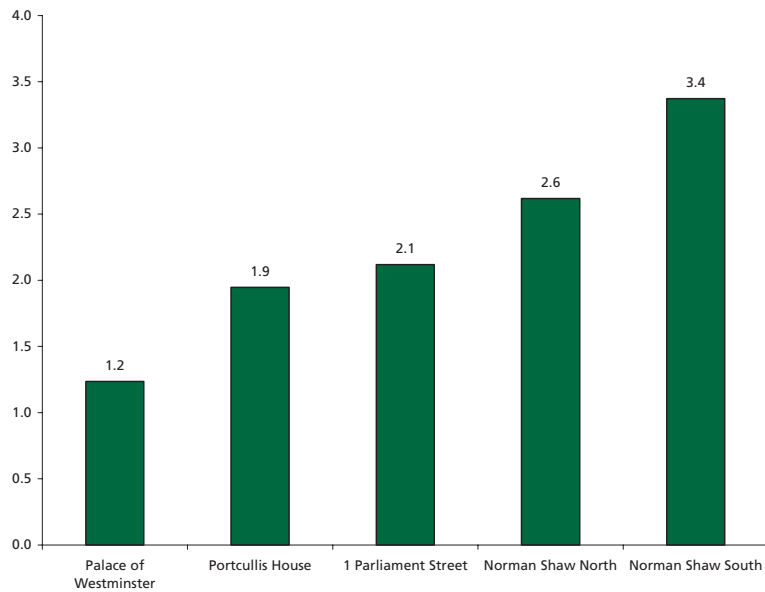
11. Members’ staff are also based in these five buildings, usually but not always in the same building as the Member for whom they work. The Serjeant at Arms has 228 Members’ staff desks to distribute; in addition there are 194 desks in suited rooms in Portcullis House, as well as six suited staff rooms in 1 Parliament Street and one suited staff room in Norman Shaw North. Some Members’ staff are also accommodated separately from Members in rooms which are nominally Members’ rooms.

12. The following pie chart (Figure 5) shows the number of desks occupied by Members’ staff in each building, as estimated by the Serjeant on the basis of a manual desk count. This count includes not only designated Members’ staff accommodation, but also additional desks for staff for which space has been found in Members’ offices themselves at the request of those Members.

⁶ The 721 offices are all of those offices in the control of the Party Whips, with the exception of suited rooms for Members’ staff.

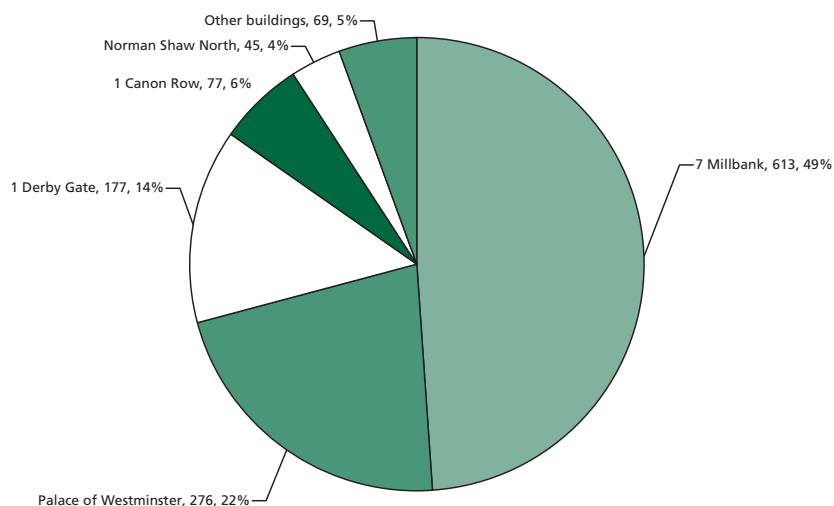
Figure 5: Number of Members' staff desk spaces by building

13. As the following graph (Figure 6) shows, there is substantial variation in the number of Members' staff present in each building in proportion to the number of Members, from little more than one member of staff per Member in the Palace to more than three members of staff per Member in Norman Shaw South. The situation in the Palace is in fact even more difficult for back-bench Members than the statistics suggest, as a large number of the staff desks in the Palace are occupied by Parliamentary Resource Unit staff, Whips' Office staff, Ministers' staff and Opposition and third party front-bench staff.

Figure 6: Number of Members's staff in proportion to number of Members, by building

14. Staff of the House have a presence in every one of the buildings on the Estate, but desk-based staff are concentrated in 7 Millbank (the building furthest from the Palace), the Palace itself and 1 Derby Gate, with smaller outposts in 1 Canon Row and Norman Shaw North.

Figure 7: Number of desk-based staff of the House by building



15. Third-party occupants include police and security (474 staff), who have accommodation mainly in 1 Canon Row (with additional accommodation in the House of Lords part of the Palace); and the Press, who occupy 174 densely occupied desk spaces in the Palace (shortly to fall to 152). The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Inter-Parliamentary Union also occupy a small amount of office space within the Palace. Contractors' accommodation within the Palace is often in the basement.

Ownership and allocation

16. All of the buildings except 7 Millbank and 2 The Abbey Garden are owned by the House through its Corporate Officer, the Clerk of the House. As Corporate Officer and Accounting Officer, the Clerk of the House is legally responsible for acquiring, managing and disposing of accommodation on behalf of the House and for accounting for its use. The Serjeant at Arms, another senior official in the House Service, has charge of all accommodation and associated services in his facilities management role. Even where the Serjeant has no control or overview of how individual rooms are used (Members' accommodation being a case in point), he is responsible for works, maintenance, furnishing and cleaning. In practice, most of these functions are carried out by staff within the Serjeant at Arms Department or by contractors managed by them.

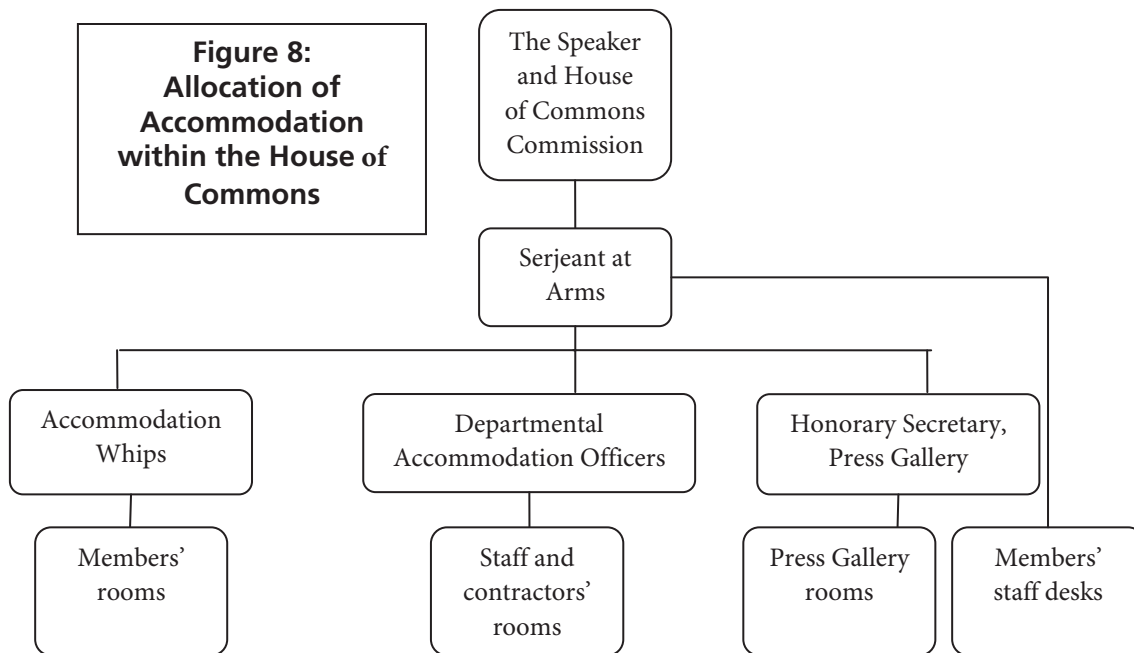
17. The broad division of office accommodation within the precincts (and associated facilities, such as photocopying rooms and storage) between the principal occupant groups is based on long-standing occupation and decisions of the House and its Committees. Recently, in more important and contentious cases, decisions on accommodation have been discussed and ratified by the House of Commons Commission. It was, for example, a

decision of the Commission to redesignate Norman Shaw South as Members' accommodation instead of accommodation for the Clerk's Department. We (like our predecessors) advise the Speaker, the Serjeant and the Commission on accommodation: Norman Shaw South, for example, was redesignated on the recommendation of one of our predecessor Committees. Minor adjustments to space allocation are made by the Serjeant at Arms, acting on behalf of the Speaker. Any such adjustments affecting Members or their staff are discussed and agreed with the Accommodation Whips.

18. Once office accommodation has been allocated to an occupant group, it is largely left to managers in each group to decide on the detail of room occupancy and layout, advised as necessary by professional staff from the Serjeant at Arms Department. It is generally a matter for each Department of the House how it arranges the staff offices within its control. Contractors' accommodation is controlled by various Departments of the House. Accommodation within the Press Gallery is allocated by its Honorary Secretary.

19. The Labour and Conservative Accommodation Whips have for some time been the Deputy Chief Whips of those parties; there is also a Liberal Democrat Accommodation Whip. Members' accommodation is divided shortly after every general election by agreement of these three Whips, in proportion to the number of Members belonging to each political party, with information and assistance available from the Serjeant at Arms. Once this overall division has been agreed, each Accommodation Whip has the freedom to allocate the rooms within their control to individual Members as they see fit. In general, Members who have been re-elected to the House have been able to keep the accommodation they occupied before the election, where they have wished to do so. Accommodation for the minority parties is allocated by the Government Accommodation Whip. Further adjustments in the party allocations are made as necessary in the course of a Parliament, for example, following a by-election.

20. Members' staff desks in rooms and areas designated for Members' staff are allocated by the Serjeant at Arms Department, which seeks to allocate one desk to every Member who applies for one, except for Members in suited accommodation. But Members' staff also have desks in Members' rooms, which are, as already mentioned, allocated by the Whips. In many cases, Members' staff share rooms with the Member for whom they work; in some cases, they occupy separate rooms designated as Members' rooms and allocated as an additional office by the relevant Whip to the Member for whom they work.



21. There is no single effective overview of where individuals have desks on the Estate. The dispersal of responsibility for allocating accommodation (see Figure 8 above) is part of the reason for this. The Serjeant knows which rooms have been allocated to individual Members for their own personal use and to which Members particular staff desks have been allocated, but he does not hold a record of additional desks in Members' rooms, nor is any central record maintained of which named individuals are actually using which staff desks. Figures provided to us by the Serjeant on the number of Members' staff based at Westminster are based on a manual desk count, rather than on centrally held information. Data on House staff accommodation is also patchy and out-of-date, with only local knowledge of who works where, and the Serjeant has no clear information on who occupies Press Gallery accommodation.

22. The House has infrastructure and facilities management software which could in theory be used to manage this information, but only the data on Members' accommodation is kept current and accurate. Other occupants, in particular some Members' staff, are a rapidly changing population. To manage information on their accommodation tightly and to a similar standard to that occupied by Members would require additional resources. To date there has been no perceived requirement to achieve this goal.

23. The dispersal of responsibility for allocating accommodation among a number of different delegates with different priorities is bound to make a co-ordinated approach (for example, the application of a space standard) difficult to achieve, particularly given the lack of central information as to how accommodation is currently being used. This lack of information may also make it difficult for the Clerk of the House to meet his legal responsibilities to account for the use of accommodation on the Estate and to provide working conditions which meet statutory requirements in areas such as health and safety.

Current strategy

24. In July 2005, the House of Commons Commission adopted an outline strategic plan for the House Administration in the period 2006–11. In this plan, the Commission identified accommodation and works as a priority area:

Space on the Parliamentary estate is at a premium. During the planning period it will be necessary to take a strategic look at how space is used to ensure a good alignment with the delivery of primary objectives. It will also be necessary to develop a long-term investment strategy that will provide accommodation that is fit for purpose and is maintained to an appropriate standard.⁷

25. In December 2005, the Board of Management agreed a Corporate Business Plan for 2006, reflecting the priorities set out in the Strategic Plan, but going into much greater detail as to the constraints identified and as to how the Administration intends to address these priorities. Two of the constraints identified are that:

- a) “there are currently no plans for more than a very limited expansion of the overall size of the parliamentary estate, primarily to provide decant and contingency space”, and
- b) “there will be continuing pressure from Members for increased support services provided by the House ... there is insufficient accommodation to meet current demand for Members’ staff to be located at Westminster”.⁸

26. Solutions suggested include “a need to develop a clear and impartial system for space allocation according to functional need”, involving “clear, agreed and open standards for all accommodation and required occupants of the estate”, “workplace planning standards of 6, 7.5 and 12.5 sq m” and “5% contingency office space”.⁹ The Business Plan explicitly seeks our advice on “agreed minimum room and furnishing standards” for all occupants of the Estate. We provide advice on this and other matters in this Report.

History

27. The Palace of Westminster was not built with Members’ office accommodation in mind. Pressure for such accommodation first became obvious towards the end of the Second World War, when the rebuilding of the Chamber was under consideration.¹⁰ This pressure grew through the following decades.

28. In the 1950s, Committees were considering “the possibility of providing more individual desks if Members desire them” and noting that there was “need on the principal floor for more room for Members to read or write”.¹¹ By the 1960s, demand for proper

7 *Outline Strategic Plan for the House of Commons Administration 2006–2011* (online at http://www.parliament.uk/about_commons/house_of_commons_commission_/strategicplan05.cfm)

8 *House of Commons Corporate Business Plan 2006*, p 16 (online at <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/CommissionCorplan.pdf>)

9 *Ibid.*, p 17

10 Report of the Joint Select Committee on Accommodation in the Palace of Westminster, Session 1944–45, HC 64-I

11 Report from the Select Committee on House of Commons Accommodation, &c., Session 1952–53, HC 309, paras 7 and 12

office space for Members was well established and towards the end of the decade, a Committee set out the aim of providing “a room of his own” for every Member, with additional accommodation for a secretary for each, on the assumption that “by the end of the century or probably earlier, every Member will have his own secretary”.¹²

29. The site immediately to the north of the Palace on the other side of Bridge Street was soon identified as having potential for expansion; a number of plans for its redevelopment were proposed in the 1960s and 1970s, but none came to fruition.¹³ Meanwhile, accommodation within the Palace was being extensively remodelled to provide office accommodation for Members, but was clearly never going to be sufficient to provide a room for every Member. Efforts to make progress were hampered by the fact that the House did not have control over budgets for works and maintenance; control over these areas finally passed from the Government to the House of Commons Commission in 1992.¹⁴

30. During the 1970s the Norman Shaw Buildings were made available to the House, and Members were also accommodated in a variety of other outbuildings at varying distances to the Chamber, none of them purpose-built. But most Members had little more in the way of accommodation than a desk and a locker. A more holistic solution began to emerge in 1978, when the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) reported that “working conditions for Parliament and those who serve it have failed lamentably to keep pace with the greatly increased and still increasing volume of activity at Westminster” and recommended “an entirely new approach to the Bridge Street site”.¹⁵ The Report was approved by the House, an architectural adviser was appointed, and, after some delay, a phased approach to the redevelopment of the site was undertaken, with work beginning in the 1980s and finally reaching completion with the opening of Portcullis House in 2000. In 2003, on the advice of the Accommodation and Works Committee, the House of Commons Commission approved the occupation of Norman Shaw South by Members, after which, for the first time, all Members were accommodated within a single secure site.

31. Thanks to the work of our predecessor Committees and others, the quantity and quality of accommodation available to Members has improved substantially over the last fifteen years. Almost every Member now has a room of his or her own; as recently as 1991, more than 350 Members—more than half—did not.¹⁶ Some Members have more than one room for themselves and their staff. A substantial number now work in suited accommodation with their staff.

32. Demand for accommodation remains strong, however. This is, as we discuss below,¹⁷ largely a result of increasing demand for space from staff employed by Members and located at Westminster. There are also a number of Members who remain in substandard

12 Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), Third Report of Session 1968–69, *Accommodation in the New Parliamentary Building*, HC 295, paras 3 and 4

13 A description of these plans is to be found in the Fifth Report from the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), Session 1977–78, *New Building for Parliament*, HC 483.

14 Q 89

15 HC (1977–78) 283, paras 1–3

16 HC (1990–91) 551, para 36

17 See paras 44–50 and 97–105.

accommodation, some of it windowless; and a small number who share an office with one or more other Members—some do so by choice, but some do not, as is shown by evidence we have received.¹⁸

Accommodation review

33. In the face of this demand for space, the Serjeant at Arms appointed HOK International Ltd to conduct a review in 2002 of the accommodation within the Estate, with terms of reference “to assess the House of Commons Estate in terms of the following: how space is used; current working practices; what accommodation and services are essential for each group to work effectively”. The review produced four reports, amounting to several hundred pages:

- a) A report of Phase 1 of the review (September 2002) containing detailed information about the Estate and those who occupy it;
- b) A benchmarking study comparing space allocation and working practices in the House with other Parliamentary and Government offices as well as selected examples from the private and corporate sector;
- c) A report of Phase 2 of the review (January 2003) containing recommendations centred on two objectives: achieving optimum use of existing space on the Estate, and providing mechanisms for managing demand for office accommodation.
- d) An Estate Occupancy Report (May 2004) reviewing staff of the House and third-party occupants against criteria designed to assess whether they needed to be located within the Estate in order to carry out their functions effectively.

34. These documents have informed the Commission’s strategy and the Board of Management’s Corporate Business Plan, and we have examined them in detail as part of our inquiry. A senior member of the HOK project team also gave evidence to us alongside the Serjeant at Arms. Copies of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports have been placed in the Library of the House.

18 Ev 37 (Mr David Jones) and Ev 41 (Mr Shailesh Vara and Mr Rob Wilson)

3 Occupants and their accommodation needs

35. In this part of the Report, we identify in more detail the accommodation needs of the various groups of occupants on the Estate and the extent to which these needs have been met. In essence, what each of the groups needs is accommodation which enables them to carry out their work effectively.

Members

36. Members generally require a room of their own with sufficient space for a desk, a workstation and storage for their papers. They need the opportunity for privacy, be it to prepare for a speech or to hold a private meeting. Most Members would not expect to hold meetings of more than three or four people in their office, as rooms can be booked for this purpose. Office location is also important. Members still need accommodation reasonably close to the Chamber, principally because of the requirement to vote in person at sometimes unpredictable and antisocial times, with eight minutes to reach the division lobbies from the calling of a vote. The meeting rooms and catering facilities in Portcullis House have increasingly become a second centre of gravity.

37. Accommodation for Members and for their staff is inextricably interlinked, as the following paragraphs show. Members' accommodation needs at Westminster are affected by whether they wish to locate any staff at Westminster, the number they wish to locate there and how they wish to work with those staff.

38. Different Members have different working patterns. As a former Accommodation Whip put it to us, “we do not have uniform MPs, we do not have uniform lifestyles or uniform ways of wanting to work either, and so there is a bit of mix and matching to be done”.¹⁹ In his evidence, Mr Unwin from HOK suggested that we should examine different models of accommodation according to the different working patterns adopted by different Members:

There is a lot of variety in the demand. There is a lot of variety in the supply. So a first step might be to try to define perhaps two or three profiles rather than having a single solution that should be right for all Members and seeing how closely the space available matches that.²⁰

39. There are in our view three basic accommodation models which would be an ideal fit for three of the most common working patterns:

- a) If a Member has no staff at Westminster, they will require a room with enough space for a workstation, paper storage, and space to hold a small private meeting.
- b) If a Member has staff at Westminster, there are two possible models:

19 Q 1 (Sir Robert Smith)

20 Q 73

- i. suited accommodation, with an office as provided at (a) above, plus an office for their staff adjoining or nearby; or
- ii. a team-working arrangement, where the Member's workstation is located in the same room as workstations for their staff; but with separate space to hold a small private meeting nearby.

40. The supply of accommodation at Westminster, although varied, is relatively inflexible. The balance of demand from Members for different types of accommodation alters, however, from Parliament to Parliament, and will continue to do so as the balance of Members' preferred working patterns shifts. As a result, not every Member can expect accommodation to be available to suit their particular working pattern of choice. But supply should try to predict demand as closely as practicable. Where supply cannot meet demand, ways of managing that demand will need to be found: for example, by making it easier for Members without a large amount of space at Westminster to work closely with staff located in the constituency.

41. The Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) in 1991 put forward minimum space standards for Members' offices of 8–10 sq m per person in existing buildings and of 15–20 sq m per person in Portcullis House.²¹ HOK more recently has proposed a space standard for a Member's office of 12.5 sq m per person.²² Both the Committee and HOK have also proposed space standards for Members' staff. The space standards proposed to date are adequate in so far as they go and have largely been met, but sufficient space is only one criterion for adequate accommodation.²³ The quality of some of the space available to Members remains poor: 45 offices are windowless and a number of others have very little natural light; some are in need of refurbishment—one Member has told us of “grubby and splintered paintwork”.²⁴ Some Members, but by no means all, have access to a private space for reflection and in which meetings can be held. We believe that all Members if they wish should have sole use of an office located within the secure part of the Parliamentary Estate, whose space, quality, furnishing layout and IT services are up to modern standards. We make proposals to improve the quality of Members' accommodation in part five of this Report.

21 HC (1990–91) 551, paras 41 and 48

22 House of Commons Accommodation Review, Phase 2 Report, p 21, para 6

23 Q 5

24 Ev 37 (Ann McKechin)

42. The aim that every Member should have a “room of their own” has very nearly been met. On paper at least, there are now more than enough Members’ offices to house every Member individually, with 76 more Members’ offices than there are Members. But 23 Members continue to share an office with one or more other Members.²⁵ Some of these do so by choice; others do not, as our evidence shows:

I am obliged to share an office with three other members ... I do not believe that it is right that Members of Parliament should be expected to share offices; they are carrying out exacting work, much of which is of a highly confidential nature.²⁶

Both of us are presently sharing an office in the Norman Shaw South building. We share the office with 3 of our staff. The office is designed for 1 Member and 1 staff. Our office is clearly overcrowded and when a request was put in for reconsideration of office space, we were informed that our Party has no further offices to allocate to Members.²⁷

43. The situation is a vast improvement on that prevailing as recently as January 1991, when 356 Members had a desk in an office shared with at least one other Member.²⁸ At that time, a Committee recommended that “as far as the buildings allow, Members in existing buildings should not be required to share offices”.²⁹ Clearly progress has been made, but we believe that the time is now right to go one step further, and accordingly **we recommend that no Member should be required to share an office with another Member if they do not wish to do so**. We comment further in part five of this Report on how this aim might best be achieved.

Members’ staff

44. While the numbers of other occupant groups which the House might need to accommodate remain predictable, this is not the case for Members’ staff. The Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) recommended in 1991 the provision of 950 desk spaces, equating to about about 1.5 staff for each Member of Parliament.³⁰ The actual population of Members’ staff on the Estate currently stands at about 1,230, about half of all permanent staff employed by Members. Members are able to apply for three parliamentary passes for staff (four passes if two of their staff work part-time). Members with front-bench positions are allowed to apply for up to four passes (five if two of their staff work part-time). Within these constraints, Members have complete freedom of choice as to whether they locate their staff at Westminster or in the constituency.

45. The number of parliamentary passes for which Members have applied on behalf of their staff varies considerably: according to the Serjeant, nearly 80 Members have no staff

25 This figure does not include instances where two Members have each been allocated a room of their own, but have chosen to share one office and to accommodate their staff in the other Member’s room. Six Members currently have such an arrangement.

26 Ev 37 (Mr David Jones)

27 Ev 41 (Mr Shailesh Vara and Mr Rob Wilson)

28 HC (1990–91) 551, para 36

29 *Ibid.*, para 42

30 *Ibid.*, para 44

based on the Estate at all; the majority have between one and three staff passes; and a small minority of 45 have four or more staff passes.³¹ We have also heard that, although it is not allowed, some non-passholders work on the Estate as Members' staff:

Members can get away with having interns or temporary staff on day visitors' passes providing there is somebody there that can go and collect them from downstairs ... They can just take them up there and they will be there for a month or two months.³²

46. Perhaps unsurprisingly, demand from Members to base staff at Westminster has outstripped supply of office space for these staff. This has led to overcrowding in space intended for Members, with potential health and safety risks for both Members and their staff.³³ We have seen a number of Members' offices intended for one person into which the maximum possible number of desks has somehow been shoehorned. On the other hand, a Trade Union representative of Members' staff has recognised that "Portcullis House has been a major improvement for the working environment of staff".³⁴

47. Members expect their staff at Westminster to be located near to them.³⁵ This is not always currently the case, especially for Members with an office in the Palace. The only dedicated working area for backbench Members' staff in the Palace is an open-plan area on the lower ground floor with little natural light and only 43 desks. As a result the staff of Members based in the Palace sometimes work from buildings some distance away.³⁶

48. On average, the amount of space available to each Member's employee located at Westminster appears to be adequate. The Committee on House of Commons (Services) recommended in 1991 and HOK have recommended more recently a workspace standard for staff of 6 to 7.5 sq m per person.³⁷ Current space densities are significantly lighter than this, according to evidence from the Serjeant, with an average of 9.2 sq m per person.³⁸ This average figure hides significant levels of variation: some staff work in very cramped conditions, often in a room with a Member who has nowhere else to house them at Westminster; in other cases, a single member of staff might share a very spacious office with a Member or even have a room of their own.

Temporary staff

49. There seems to be an increasing trend for Members to employ voluntary staff on a short-term basis, through intern programmes for example.³⁹ There are also other situations in which a Member may want temporary access to a desk space at Westminster: for example, for visits by constituency staff. There are currently no workstations for temporary

31 Ev 51, Figure 7

32 Q 175 (Gill Cheeseman)

33 Qq 171–172

34 Q 176

35 Q 32 (Mr Ainsworth)

36 Ev 37 (Susan Kramer)

37 HC (1990–91) 551, para 44; House of Commons Accommodation Review, Phase 2 Report, Annex pp 7 and 8

38 Ev 51, Figure 6

39 Ev 35 (Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods)

staff, other than any that Members may provide within their own office space. We have heard that some Members have acquired a staff desk space from the Serjeant at Arms' allocation and leave it unoccupied most of the time, so that it can be available for the rare occasions on which they need it.⁴⁰

50. The requirement to accommodate temporary staff is currently uncertain and unspecified. As the Clerk of the House told us: “we know that there are constant incomings and outgoings, from interns, from people on work experience, from volunteers. How many of them should we be expected to cater for at any one time?”⁴¹ We seek to provide answers in part five of this Report.

Front bench and party parliamentary allocation

51. Of the 721 offices available to Members, 126 rooms are designated as Official rooms for Whips, Ministers, the Shadow Cabinet, and the leader of the third largest parliamentary party.⁴² All of these rooms are within the Palace. Some are traditionally designated for specific office holders, such as the Prime Minister, Leader of the House and Leader of the Opposition. Other rooms are designated for a class of office holder, such as Ministers or the Shadow Cabinet. In addition, parliamentary resource units around Cloister Court in the Palace house nine staff working for the Parliamentary Labour Party and 14 staff working for the Conservative Party, with ten Liberal Democrat researchers accommodated in 2 The Abbey Garden. These resource units are intended as a pooled research resource available to any Members of the relevant parties. All of these rooms fall within the purview of the Accommodation Whips.

52. In practice, the situation is more fluid than this. The Leader of the Opposition now occupies some 250 sq m of Members' accommodation in Norman Shaw South, rather than the room traditionally occupied by the Leader of the Opposition in the Palace, which is currently used instead by a senior member of the Shadow Cabinet. Some Ministers have been allocated several official rooms (one has four rooms, another three). Others have offices not designated for Ministers—unsurprisingly, as there are more Ministers than designated ministerial offices.

53. Front-bench and back-bench Members do not have identical accommodation needs. Government Ministers, unlike other Members, generally have a second office nearby, in the Departments they run. But at times they are required to be within the precincts of House, especially when a Government majority is slight, and yet continue to carry out their ministerial responsibilities, assisted by civil servants. Ministers therefore need offices within the precincts. The offices they currently occupy within the Palace provide sufficient physical security and allow for easy access for civil servants and official papers. While Cabinet Ministers generally occupy fine rooms within the Palace, other Ministers' offices in the Palace tend to be small and not of the highest standard.

40 Qq 185–188 ; Ev 42 (Joy Greenfield)

41 Q 121

42 Ev 49, para 13

54. The accommodation situation is fluid, as a result of ministerial and Shadow Cabinet reshuffles. Difficulties arise when the parliamentary staff of a newly promoted Minister work at Westminster in the more spacious accommodation available to a senior backbench Member, and it may not be possible to find space for them in the smaller room allocated to their Member as a junior Minister:

when they have been made a Minister and they have had what we describe as ‘less than desirable’ accommodation, let us say over in Norman Shaw North, and I have wound up allocating them some tiny little office as a Minister in the official accommodation I have not chucked them out of Norman Shaw North because nobody else particularly wanted it and their staff were up to their eyeballs over there.⁴³

55. The Serjeant at Arms has suggested that Ministers’ accommodation, which he points out includes “a number of prime rooms with close proximity to the Chamber”, is in some cases “under-utilised”, with only a third of ministerial rooms “used frequently”.⁴⁴ The Government Accommodation Whip has disagreed:

to suggest that Ministers can do without ... a place in the House I think is naïve beyond belief. Ministers may not work in their offices all day but invariably they are there in the evenings; they have Red Boxes being delivered there; they have to make private telephone calls and they are slaving away in their little cells for the most part.⁴⁵

56. Some Ministerial accommodation is not particularly pleasant, offices in the Lower Ministerial Corridor and Star Chamber Court being cases in point. It may be that refurbishment and rearrangement of this accommodation could create a more pleasant and suitable working environment for Members of the Government and it may be that Ministers’ accommodation needs might be met without necessarily providing an individual cellular room for every Minister, although this is clearly what some Ministers continue to want.⁴⁶ The important thing is that any proposals should be acceptable to all concerned. **We recommend that the Serjeant at Arms with the Government Accommodation Whip should explore Ministers’ requirements for accommodation within the precincts of the House and should come back to us with proposals if it seems that these requirements at times of peak demand can be met more economically through innovative use of space.**

57. For front-bench Opposition Members, unlike Ministers, their main offices are those within the precincts. The House has recognised the need to provide financial support through Short Money of the parliamentary business of opposition parties and of the Leader of the Opposition. It is therefore appropriate that some accommodation should also be set aside for this business.

58. Demand for more accommodation on the Estate for front-bench and party parliamentary purposes is increasing. According to the Clerk of the House, the Chairman

43 Q 13 (Mr Ainsworth)

44 Ev 50, para 19

45 Q1

46 Ev 37 (Alan Johnson)

of the Labour Party recently asked for six additional offices, while the Conservative Party has asked the Serjeant for space to accommodate policy review staff.⁴⁷ The Serjeant has been asked by the Liberal Democrat Party to allocate more space within 2 The Abbey Garden to the Party's Policy and Research Unit, a request that he has so far resisted.⁴⁸ As we were told by a former Liberal Democrat Accommodation Whip:

the party's Short money has increased, the need for more space for its resource centre and obviously the party has increased in strength here, but the increasing responsibility on the Leader's Office and the resources necessarily available to support that Leader's Office is now under strain within the current allocation.⁴⁹

59. The Opposition's decision to house their Leader and his staff in accommodation in Norman Shaw South (in rooms intended for Members' personal offices) has also increased potential demand; as the Government Accommodation Whip told us: "within our allocation I do not know how we could ever create such a facility".⁵⁰ The Opposition's decision has raised the issue of the adequacy of the accommodation officially set aside for the Shadow Cabinet. This issue is likely to be brought into the foreground again if it is not properly resolved.

60. There is currently no clear framework either for assessing demand or for deciding what is an appropriate use of the House's accommodation. The Clerk of the House, who has to account for the proper use of the House's facilities, has told us that "the extent to which Parliament should be providing accommodation to support party political activity" is "a matter of continuing concern" to him.⁵¹ The House Administration tends to be faced with incremental demands for additional space rather than any overall statement of requirement for accommodation for Opposition front-bench purposes, and there is no clear statement of which kinds of staff the House might be expected to accommodate and which it should not. The Clerk of the House has proposed that appropriate standards to implement might be that "if staff are funded from Short Money ... or from the Member's staffing allowance, both of which are parliamentary funds, then perhaps we have an obligation to accommodate them. If they are not, we have no obligation."⁵² A difficulty might arise where staff are funded partly from these sources and partly from others. A further difficulty is that the Opposition parties are not currently obliged to identify which of their staff are paid from Short Money. It is also long accepted that parliamentary resource units are legitimately housed in Parliament.

61. Front-bench accommodation must be provided without encroaching on back-bench allocations. Those needs therefore need to be quantified and boundaries set. A definition must be agreed of who it is appropriate and possible to accommodate on the Estate and who political parties should expect to accommodate elsewhere. Demands for

47 Q 127

48 Ev 55, para 2

49 Q 1

50 Q 9

51 Q 110

52 Q 128

additional space must be realistic given the constraints of the existing Estate and the competing demands for space within it.

Staff of the House

62. Some staff of the House are closely connected with the work of the Chamber. Others provide immediate face-to-face services to Members. Such staff need to be in the Palace or nearby, but location is generally less crucial for other staff of the House—the majority. The Clerk of the House has told us that “relatively little of the accommodation in the Palace is now still occupied by House staff other than the areas that are directly linked to the Chamber and committees”.⁵³

63. The numbers of staff of the House have grown significantly in recent years. Almost all of this expansion has been contained within 7 Millbank, a building separate from the secure Estate, and has been achieved through arrangements such as more open-plan arrangement of offices and some hotdesking. Staff occupy few of the offices in the buildings to the north of Bridge Street, with the exception of Library staff in 1 Derby Gate, who vacated rooms in the Palace to move there, and staff of the Parliamentary Estates Directorate in 1 Canon Row.

64. However, a comparatively large number of staff continue to occupy a significant amount of space in the Palace. 276 desk-based staff (22 per cent of all desk-based staff) work in the Palace, occupying more than 3,250 square metres of office space—about 30 per cent of the total office space available in the Commons part of the building. As a result, we asked the Board of Management to justify the occupation of this space.⁵⁴ We comment further in part five of this Report on steps that might be taken to ensure that accommodation in the Palace is occupied by those who need it most. **We and our predecessors have taken the consistent view that Members should have priority over office accommodation in the Palace above those staff of the House with no clear business need to be there.**

65. Current office space densities for staff of the House generally meet the standards recommended by HOK. These standards range from 6 sq m per person for a general workspace, to 12.5 sq m per person for a workspace with meeting area.⁵⁵ Currently the workspace density for staff of the House averages at 10.5 square metres per person.⁵⁶

66. There is clearly a perception among some Members that staff of the House have better accommodation than Members themselves.⁵⁷ The Government Accommodation Whip has told us that “there are members of the Administration in this place who enjoy better accommodation than some Members do”.⁵⁸ The Serjeant has said that he does not recognise “all these officials who are housed in grandiose offices”.⁵⁹ Some senior staff need

53 Q 103

54 Ev 58 ff. (Clerk of the House)

55 House of Commons Accommodation Review, Phase 2 Report, p 21, para 6

56 Ev 51, para 27

57 Ev 35 (Nick Ainger), Ev 38 (Mr Denis MacShane)

58 Q 1

59 Q 83

to meet privately with Members, staff and contractors, and are likely to have similar office accommodation needs to Members. According to the Trade Union Side, the efficiency of some of the House's services has been "limited by poor accommodation".⁶⁰ But **the House Service must recognise that it is in its own interests to occupy no more space than is needed to do its work.**

67. Nearly 500 staff of the House (about 40 per cent) are not desk-based. They require adequate rest facilities, and changing facilities if they are uniformed. One of the Trades Union has suggested that the availability of rest facilities is not consistent across the House Service.⁶¹

Third parties

68. Third parties on the Estate include the Press Gallery, police and security personnel, service providers, such as the parliamentary travel agent and post offices, and maintenance and service contractors. The numbers of personnel in each category are set out in evidence from the Serjeant at Arms.⁶²

69. The Press Gallery has traditionally occupied accommodation close to the Chamber, which they have told us they continue to need.⁶³ The Gallery currently occupies nearly 1,500 sq m of space in the Palace, with a current workplace density of only 4.35 sq m per workspace. Given continued demand from Members for accommodation on the Estate and in the Palace in particular, the area is of obvious interest. However, **a programme for the redevelopment of the Press Gallery area has been agreed between the House of Commons Commission and the Gallery, and we accept that any new proposals for the use of this space should await the completion of this work.**

70. The presence of the police and security personnel within the Estate is obviously necessary, particularly in these times of heightened risk. Providers of immediate services to Members, such as the Travel Office and Post Office, need to be located where Members and others can access them. We note that maintenance and service contractors often occupy basement areas of the Palace for which it would not otherwise be easy to find a use. Contractors do not generally seem to occupy prime accommodation within the Palace or elsewhere on the Estate. Contractors have varying accommodation needs, but it is not clear how these are assessed, what procedures are in place to try to provide for these needs or whether their current accommodation is suitable.

Non-office accommodation

71. Our inquiry centres on office accommodation, but substantial areas of the Estate are put to other uses. In this section, we consider residential accommodation provided within the Estate, the provision of meeting rooms and storage space and the possibility for bringing into use space which is currently classified as 'unusable'.

60 Q 141

61 Ev 47 (Public and Commercial Services Union)

62 Ev 53, Figure 10

63 Q 147

Residential accommodation

72. The Speaker is the only person to whom residential accommodation is provided within the Commons part of the Palace. His predecessors have given up much of the original residence to state function rooms and Members' office accommodation.

73. Several officials occupy residential accommodation in houses on Parliament Street and Canon Row, to which their predecessors moved when vacating accommodation in the Palace and Norman Shaw South to make way for Members' offices. Three office keepers occupy relatively modest accommodation and provide 24-hour on-site emergency cover: their presence on-site is fairly easily justified.

74. Three senior officials—the Clerk of the House, Serjeant at Arms and Speaker's Secretary—have more extensive houses. Their presence on-site has been justified by the need for them to “attend upon the Speaker whenever he requires this” and to “react to, and if necessary direct any emergency, especially in the area of security”.⁶⁴ The buildings they occupy were described in 1991 by the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) as follows:

two mid-18th Century houses, facing onto Parliament Street, together with two smaller dwellings in Canon Row, which are probably of late 17th century date (and therefore amongst the oldest surviving domestic buildings in central London). These four houses, which had been neglected and were structurally very frail (hence unsuitable for use as offices), have been carefully restored.⁶⁵

Because they are physically part of the secure Parliamentary Estate, it is almost certainly not feasible to dispose of these buildings.

75. We recognise that the houses currently occupied by officials were built as residential accommodation and have historic value as such, and that it may be difficult to find suitable alternative uses for them. However, in our view the provision of residential accommodation at public expense can only be justified by defined business need and should be subject to regular review.

Meeting rooms

76. The meeting rooms available in the Palace and Portcullis House sometimes seem to struggle to meet existing demand. In some circumstances it might be appropriate to convert residential accommodation on the Estate into meeting rooms. Other rooms not suitable for office accommodation might also be used for bookable meetings. This could include windowless rooms, and the Lobby Briefing Room in the north turret of the Upper Committee Corridor. This room is currently seriously underused. We have heard from the Press Lobby that its members need priority access to a space in which briefings can be received, often at very short notice.⁶⁶ This does not justify very occasional and exclusive use of a prime room within the Palace. **We recommend that the Lobby Briefing Room**

64 Ev 56, Annex 2, para 3

65 HC (1990–91) 551, para 5

66 Qq 148–150

should be made available for booking as a meeting room by other occupants of the Estate, on the understanding that these bookings might have to be moved or cancelled at short notice if the room were required for Lobby briefings.

Storage

77. We noticed during our tours of accommodation on the Estate that rooms in the Palace set aside for storage of documents and stationery supplies often seemed to be inefficiently used. Rationalisation of this storage could free space for office use. The area around North Curtain Corridor in the Palace caught our attention in particular. We also query whether a dedicated video viewing room is still required.

78. The HOK Accommodation Review has recommended a reduction of the amount of space on the Estate occupied by filing and document storage through a number of initiatives including electronic records management, advice to Members' staff on document retention and remote storage. Off-site storage for non-business-critical documents is available. The House Administration also has plans to move towards electronic records management, although this is some years off, and at least one Member is also keen to explore greater use of electronic file storage.⁶⁷

Works of Art

79. There are around 7,500 items in the art collections of both Houses of Parliament. The Advisory Committee on Works of Art has specifically asked us to consider whether space could be allocated for:

- a permanent exhibition space for items from the House of Commons collection, perhaps in the new Visitors Reception Building or proposed Visitor Centre, and
- a more modern, on-site storage facility for the House of Commons collection.

80. Our Sub-Committee intends to consider the first of these requests as part of its inquiry into a Parliamentary Visitor Centre. As regards the second request, the Works of Art Committee notes that “works are currently kept in an awkwardly located room which does not have suitable climate control and which is too small”.⁶⁸ **We support the Works of Art Committee’s request for a modern climate-controlled secure storage facility for the House of Commons art collection. We recommend that off-site as well as on-site storage options should be explored, given the competing demands for space and priority for refurbishment on the Estate.**

Families and children

81. The current facilities provided on-site for families and children include a Members' Families' Room in the Palace with a television set and newspapers, and a small adjoining changing room; and a baby care room, also in the Palace, where parents can feed babies in

67 Ev 35 (Mr Jonathan Djanogly)

68 Ev 45

privacy and comfort. There are also baby-changing facilities in the Palace and in Portcullis House.

82. In the last Parliament, the Administration Committee considered the possibility of providing a crèche on the Parliamentary Estate.⁶⁹ The House of Commons Commission did not take this idea further, preferring instead to extend a childcare voucher scheme to Members' staff with children under 12.⁷⁰ The issue of a crèche has been raised again with us by Members and their staff.⁷¹ This is a matter which was discussed fairly recently. If we were to consider it again, it would deserve detailed consideration of a kind that we have not been able to give in the course of this inquiry.

Non-usable space

83. Of the internal space on the Estate, 47 per cent is classed as “unusable”.⁷² This includes some space which by any other than industry definitions would be considered eminently usable, such as the atrium courtyard in Portcullis House. It also, however, includes areas which might have the potential to be brought into use, such as the tower above Central Lobby, which was at one stage investigated as a possible site for broadcasting facilities.⁷³ Although we would not want to return the Palace to the situation of overcrowding described by one of our predecessor Committees in 1978 when in-filling of courtyard and roof space was rampant and working conditions were described as “more and more unfavourable” as a result,⁷⁴ **it is important to continue to explore opportunities to bring into use space which is currently classed as unusable. We recommend that all space currently classed as unusable should be systematically analysed to identify whether it might be brought into use and that the results of this analysis should be brought back to us on a rolling basis as soon as they are available.**

69 Administration Committee, Minutes of Proceedings, Session 2002–03, HC 1294, p 11 (9 July 2003)

70 HC Deb, 24 January 2006, col 1304

71 Ev 38 (Julie Morgan), Ev 40 (Jo Swinson), Ev 42 (Mette Kjaerby, Kari Mawhood)

72 Ev 48, para 5

73 Select Committee on Broadcasting, &c., First Report of Session 1990–91, *The Arrangements for the Permanent Televising of the Proceedings of the House*, HC 11, paras 61 and 67

74 HC (1977–78) 483, paras 34–37

4 Constraints

84. In this part of the Report, we consider the constraints by which the provision of accommodation on the Parliamentary Estate is currently bound. Some of these constraints are a fact of life which must be managed. Others are unnecessary, and we hope in this Report to point the way to more effective solutions.

Legacy building issues

85. The current Estate is larger and more coherent than it has ever been in the past. HOK have suggested that there is in theory total capacity on the existing Estate for an additional 842 workspaces.⁷⁵ But to achieve anything close to this in practice would involve the allocation of space on the basis of need rather than status and would require significant and disruptive churn of the current occupants, which might be difficult to enforce on those currently in occupation of space which exceeds the recommended standards. As Mr Unwin told us:

Even though you can do a desk-top exercise to show that it is possible to provide reasonable space per person across the Estate, without a longer period of decant and an appropriate process whereby you can actually reallocate that space in time, perhaps through a more transparent process as has been addressed, there is very little opportunity to effect that change without causing considerable disruption during a time when the House is in session.⁷⁶

86. While it might be desirable to move some current occupants out of accommodation they currently occupy, this could only be achieved if there were alternative accommodation to which to move them. **Following a period of recent growth, we have to accept that the Estate is unlikely to expand further to any significant extent during the current planning period.** This is in line with the thrust of the House of Commons Commission’s strategic plan. If the population of the Estate were to increase further it might be necessary to acquire additional space—but the additional expense of doing so would need to be justified.

87. Having accepted that the Estate is unlikely to expand, we must also accept that there is no possibility of supplying what Mr Unwin described to us as “the optimum situation of a lot of suited accommodation next to the Chamber”.⁷⁷ We were surprised, given some of Mr Unwin’s remarks,⁷⁸ to hear the Director of Estates tell us that it would be possible to “change the Estate strategy” to “meet” the requirement of providing a suite for every Member.⁷⁹ A subsequent paper from the Serjeant has clarified that

75 House of Commons Accommodation Review, Phase 2 Report, Annex, p 10; Q 59

76 Q 66

77 Q 59

78 Q 76

79 Q 70

it is not possible to provide suited accommodation for all Members within the current estate. To achieve suited accommodation as a strategic aim it would require the House to take on additional accommodation either in the Westminster area or elsewhere.⁸⁰

Palace of Westminster

88. The Palace is a Grade I listed building and an important part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. **There are legal, practical, aesthetic and historic reasons which mean that it is both difficult and undesirable to make significant alterations to the Palace; but the accommodation within it leaves a great deal to be desired.** In the words of a Committee of more than 60 years ago:

it naturally does not contain the conveniences of a modern building, nor can it readily be adapted to meet the changed and changing needs of Members of Parliament.⁸¹

89. A large proportion of the building is unsuitable for use as office space. What offices there are have generally been carved out of former residences and even the few spacious rooms available do not fit Members' needs already described in the previous part of this Report.

90. The desirability of proximity to the Chamber leads to demand for space within the Palace which the building struggles to meet. In general the quality of Members' accommodation is higher and the layout more appropriate in other buildings, with rooms in Portcullis House setting the standard. Rooms in the Palace tend to be cellular, whether they are large or small. Members aspire to the larger rooms, but multiple occupancy of such rooms would be a much more efficient use of the space available than occupancy by a Member on his or her own or with a single member of staff. The smaller rooms in the Palace leave little or no space for Members' staff, who are consigned to an open-plan basement area with little natural light if they are in the Palace at all, or otherwise occupy space intended for Members.

91. Modern conveniences such as air conditioning units are in urgent need of being explored. Offices which are located on the top floor of the Palace of Westminster suffer from poor ventilation, particularly in the height of summer, and this needs to be rectified. The House Authorities also need to gain better control of an archaic heating system. Often radiators can only be switched off if the entire heating system is shut down, which leads to calls for the entire system to be reviewed.

Furniture

92. How a space is furnished is an important factor in determining whether it can be used effectively. In 2003, staff in the Serjeant at Arms Department devised a furnishing standard for Members' offices in buildings other than Portcullis House. The impetus seems to have

80 Ev 56

81 HC (1944–45) 64–I, p xi

been two-fold: to control the furnishings budget, which was regularly overspent; and to give guidance to staff responsible for preparing Members' offices for occupation. It is unfortunate that, unlike the standard for Portcullis House, which was endorsed by the Accommodation & Works Committee, this standard was prepared without any input from Members themselves. This has led to friction which might otherwise have been avoided, for example concerning the provision of sofas in Members' offices.⁸² The Serjeant has recognised that the process of devising and implementing the current standard was not ideal,⁸³ and the House Service's Corporate Business Plan for 2006 indicates that he expects to ask us to advise on a new standard in the course of this year.⁸⁴ Nonetheless there are constraints, budgetary, aesthetic and practical, which need to be acknowledged and it is appropriate that furnishing provision should take these constraints into account.

Information and Communication Technology

93. Information and Communication Technology could help to alleviate some of the current overcrowding problems on the Estate. Instead, however, the current inadequate provision acts as an obstacle to Members interested in basing staff away from Westminster. This is too important and detailed a subject area to cover in depth in this Report. We will, however, be conducting a full inquiry into the provision of ICT services in the very near future.

94. In its report on Parliamentary Pay and Allowances in 2004, the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) recommended "that the level and range of IT support offered to constituency offices should be improved to a level comparable with that offered on the Parliamentary Estate".⁸⁵ However, in recent months, the ICT service in the constituency has, if anything, deteriorated rather than improved. The Government Accommodation and Opposition Chief Whips have described the service as "scandalously poor" and "appalling" respectively.⁸⁶ **The gulf between the quality of the Parliamentary ICT service provided in the constituency and that provided at Westminster is a major disincentive to Members locating their staff in the constituency. It also impedes the smooth running of Members' offices and leads to a poorer quality of service for constituents.**

95. Greater resources will be needed, and assistance for users through cultural change, if the potential for saving space through increased use of electronic document and records management, already mentioned above, can be realised.

96. There is currently little alternative to providing fixed workstations for people operating from the Estate. Hot-desking has been introduced in the Parliamentary Information and Communication Technology Department (PICT) and some shared workstations are available in the e-Library in Portcullis House. We comment in the next part of this Report on the opportunities that wireless access to the Parliamentary Network might provide for

82 Administration Committee, Minutes of Proceedings for 18 October 2005

83 Q 44

84 *House of Commons Corporate Business Plan*, p 17

85 Senior Salaries Review Body, Report No. 57, *Review of Parliamentary Pay and Allowances 2004*, Cm 6354-I, p 30

86 Q 1

greater flexibility in how people work at Westminster, possibly leading to a reduction in the need for fixed office space.

Expectations

97. Members' uncertainty about the quantity and quality of accommodation they should expect for themselves and for their staff gives rise to much of the dissatisfaction that we have heard in the course of our inquiry.

98. The wide variety of Members' accommodation, from the highly desirable to the utterly inadequate, encourages those Members who are less well provided to be unhappy with their allocation—some because it is genuinely insufficient for them to do their work effectively, but others because they aspire to something better, having seen what is available to some of their colleagues. The Opposition Chief Whip put the conundrum to us succinctly:

if there were 500 offices all of equal size or Portcullis House could accommodate 500 or 600 Members then every Member would have the same accommodation and there would be no question about it, it would be easy to do. But unfortunately that is not the case we are in and therefore there are going to be some people with better offices than others and somebody has to decide who is going to have those offices.⁸⁷

99. We support the general thrust of HOK's recommendation that space on the Estate needs to be used more efficiently to enable demand to be met more effectively. However, this may be difficult to achieve in particular cases, especially where senior Members have entrenched working habits and have been in long if space-inefficient occupancy of a large room.⁸⁸ It would be a brave Accommodation Whip who sought in the interests of space efficiency to remove his most senior Members from the most desirable accommodation to replace them with a larger number of Members' staff. But the fact that these Members occupy these large rooms fuels the expectations of their less well provided colleagues as to what they might expect in the longer term.

100. The most important area of uncertainty concerns Members' expectations about the numbers of staff that they can hope to locate on the Estate. Submissions we have received show that some Members have expectations which the current Estate would not be able to accommodate comfortably if at all, were they applied across the board:

every MP should have a minimum of 2 small offices near the chamber (and ideally 3).⁸⁹

I should also like to be able to employ a third member of staff but am prevented from doing so by the lack of accommodation for a third desk.⁹⁰

87 Q 1 (Mr McLoughlin)

88 Q 120

89 Ev 34 (Adam Afriyie)

90 Ev 36 (Mr Nick Gibb)

Members should be able to accommodate at least two members of staff on the Estate.⁹¹

In my own room, which is about the size of an old-fashioned railway carriage, I have to work with two or three staff and it really is quite unpleasant.⁹²

During normal working hours there are three staff working here. There is therefore nowhere in the office for me to work until the evening.⁹³

101. The level of these expectations is unsurprising, given that Members receive an allowance designed to enable them to employ up to three full-time-equivalent staff and that they are allowed to apply for at least three parliamentary passes for their full-time staff. As one Member has aptly put it to us:

I am quite mystified why MPs are allowed to have three staff passes but there is clearly insufficient accommodation for them on the parliamentary estate.⁹⁴

102. Expectations are also affected by the very different amounts of space available to different Members, which allows some Members to accommodate more staff comfortably than others:

Some colleagues of similar seniority, have accommodation for three members of staff whilst I, and I am sure other colleagues, can only accommodate one.⁹⁵

You wind up with a fairly senior Member with a fairly decent office who really does not need it but he is not going to give it up, and yet you might have new Members who have staff crawling up the wall, interns coming out of their ears, who think, ‘Why can I not have that space there that they are not using?’⁹⁶

103. According to HOK, within the current allocation of Members’ accommodation there is sufficient space in theory to provide every Member with their own individual office and in addition to find space in other rooms for an average of 1.5 staff per Member. In order to accommodate two staff for each Member, some Members would need to share rooms with their staff. But even in order to allow Members to accommodate this relatively modest number of staff comfortably at Westminster, larger rooms (above 20 sq m) would need to be converted from single occupancy by Members to multiple occupancy by Members’ staff.⁹⁷

104. Currently, an average of 1.9 staff are accommodated at Westminster for every Member; given HOK’s calculations, it is hardly surprising that Members find the space they have inadequate for the numbers of staff they are attempting to house. Within the current arrangement of Members’ and Members’ staff rooms, it is not even possible to

91 Ev 37 (Mr David Jones)

92 Ev 38 (Mr Denis MacShane)

93 Ev 39 (Mr Andrew Slaughter)

94 Ev 36 (Mr Philip Dunne)

95 *Ibid.*

96 Q 34 (Mr Ainsworth)

97 Q 59 (Mr Unwin)

accommodate one member of staff for every Member of Parliament in distinct rooms outside Members' own offices.

105. Within the space currently available, Members should not expect to be able to accommodate more than two members of staff comfortably at Westminster. Members who have been allocated enough space to accommodate more staff than this are in a fortunate position compared to the majority of their colleagues. Some Members will find that they have space for only one member of staff. Those Members who attempt to accommodate more staff in the rooms at their disposal than the space can adequately house must bear in mind the health and safety consequences of doing so.

Flux and flexibility

106. The Estate is subject to a regular programme of maintenance which at times requires occupants to be temporarily displaced, for example during the ongoing installation of comfort cooling in 7 Millbank and during the forthcoming long-term programme of repair of the cast iron roofs in the Palace. Those displaced need adequate alternative temporary accommodation.

107. Flexibility around the edges is also needed to cope with changing numbers of occupants and occupants whose roles and needs may change. As the Government Accommodation Whip has put it to us, “if the puzzle [is] completely full you cannot move anybody”.⁹⁸ At the time of a Government reshuffle, a junior backbencher may be asked to join the Government as a junior Minister and a senior Cabinet Minister may leave the Government. It will not necessarily be appropriate for them simply to swap offices.

108. A certain quantity of decant and contingency space needs to be preserved to cope with these kinds of eventuality. The approved recommendation from HOK is that five per cent of the total office accommodation available should be set aside for such purposes.⁹⁹ The Serjeant at Arms has made a “plea” to us that decant accommodation should be preserved as such so that major works projects can proceed successfully.¹⁰⁰ However, it is not always appreciated why some offices might need to be kept empty.¹⁰¹

109. Some offices are not empty, but are infrequently or irregularly used. Sometimes this may be appropriate: we have already mentioned Ministerial offices above.¹⁰² Other examples are workstations set aside in the Palace as ‘hot desks’ for staff of the House who have an occasional business need to be there: as division clerks, for example, or on duty in the Library. The provision of these desks is a necessary consequence of these staff working for the majority of the time from an outbuilding rather than from the Palace.

110. We accept the need for decant accommodation to be preserved to enable maintenance, temporary projects and reorganisation of the occupancy of the Estate. We note, however, that it is not always well understood why offices, sometimes good

98 Q 30 (Mr Ainsworth)

99 House of Commons Accommodation Review, Phase 2 Report, p 14

100 Qq 62–64

101 Ev 36 (Paul Flynn); Ev 41 (Mr Shailesh Vara and Mr Rob Wilson); Q 170

102 See para 55 above.

offices, need to be kept empty when there is demand for this accommodation. We therefore recommend that any decant requirement should be justified and explained to relevant stakeholders, including Members. Accommodation which is used infrequently or irregularly should also be justified.

Systems

111. A number of Members have written to us to express their dissatisfaction with the way that Members' accommodation is currently allocated, suggesting in some cases that the accommodation should be allocated by the House Administration instead of by the Whips:

The current system for allocating accommodation does not work fairly or effectively.¹⁰³

There is strong impression that the allocation of offices is used as an instrument of a patronage in a sometimes capricious manner. Decisions often fail to achieve an equitable and efficient use of space.¹⁰⁴

I consider the current arrangements for the allocation of office space for Members to be profoundly unsatisfactory. Allocations are made by the Party Whips, and are used in effect as a disciplinary mechanism which should not be accepted in a modern Parliament. One effect of this arrangement is a less than efficient use of the space available ... In my view, allocation of Members' offices should be the responsibility of the House authorities within guidelines set by the Administration Committee.¹⁰⁵

Allocation of rooms is currently haphazard and non-transparent—I do not envy the job of party whips in attempting to allocate places but it inevitably leads to inconsistency.¹⁰⁶

I do think there ought to be some rough rule of seniority that could be in play rather than it being very much in the hands of the whips who in my experience allocate on the basis of favouritism or a sense of reward and punishment.¹⁰⁷

Diktat and caprice.¹⁰⁸

The current system for allocating accommodation does not work fairly and effectively because accommodation is used as a political tool by the whips. It is not appropriate that they have the ability to move people around when accommodation is of a varied standard; if all offices were the same size it would not be so much of a problem. Perhaps it would be better if the Serjeant at Arms Department took on this responsibility instead.¹⁰⁹

103 Ev 35 (Nick Ainger)

104 Ev 36 (Paul Flynn)

105 Ev 36 (Kelvin Hopkins)

106 Ev 38 (Ann McKechin)

107 Ev 38 (Mr Denis MacShane)

108 Ev 38 (Mr Robert Marshall-Andrews)

109 Ev 39 (Geraldine Smith)

112. **We should make it clear from the outset that in our view there is no realistic alternative to the current system whereby the Whips allocate individual rooms to Members.** The system is not perfect, but it is effective. It is a job which, as the Government Accommodation Whip told us, “it is extremely difficult to think of who else is capable of doing”.¹¹⁰ And as the Opposition Chief Whip has remarked,

It would be nice to find a great system that meant everybody was satisfied with their office accommodation; but I do not think we are going to find such a system.¹¹¹

Any authority seeking to allocate rooms differing so widely in size and quality would no doubt face accusations of unfairness and favouritism. These are accusations which the Whips are robust enough to face; it would not, however, be fair to submit House of Commons staff to the same treatment.

113. The split in the control of accommodation between the Whips, the various Departments of the House and the Press Gallery mean that an overall requirement for space is difficult to assess with any accuracy. In the case of Members’ staff any assessment would be particularly difficult to conduct, given that the allocation of their accommodation is partly controlled by the Serjeant and partly in the hands of the Whips. The Clerk of the House is currently expected to be held formally accountable for the use of a resource over which he has no overview, let alone control. **Where one group of occupants or another claims to need more accommodation, lack of certainty over how accommodation is being used and who it is being used by makes such claims difficult to assess objectively.**

114. We have been made aware of suggestions from Members of the smaller parliamentary parties, whose accommodation is allocated by the Government Accommodation Whip, that they do not receive their fair share of Members’ accommodation.¹¹² We are happy to confirm our view that **it is important that the allocation of accommodation to Members of each and every political party should comprise a reasonably equitable cross-section of the rooms available across the Estate.**

115. There are currently a number of anomalies in the allocation of Members’ accommodation that it would be remiss of us not to mention. Some Members have two or more offices; others have a single very large office; others have to share an office with one or more other Members; still others occupy space which is clearly substandard. Where Members have two offices, this is sometimes because, as the Government Accommodation Whip explained to us, there is insufficient space to accommodate their parliamentary staff in the ministerial accommodation they have been allocated.¹¹³ But there are also a number of Members with two or more sizeable offices. These include front-bench and back-bench Members from each of the three largest parties.

110 Q 1 (Mr Ainsworth)

111 Q 1 (Mr McLoughlin)

112 Qq 21–22

113 Q 13

116. Some Members have less than 10 sq m office space; others more than 60 sq m. **Members' needs for office space vary principally according to the numbers of staff they wish to locate at Westminster. But these needs alone do not explain why some Members have more than six times as much space at their disposal as others. Where Members occupy substandard accommodation, this may be because of a lack of sufficient adequate Members' accommodation; but it may also be because of how the Members' accommodation available has been allocated.**

117. Given the varied accommodation available, there can never be complete equality among Members in the accommodation they receive, but it is important that disparities should be minimised so far as possible. **The current wide discrepancies in the accommodation allocated to individual Members do not help to make the case that Members may need more overall space on the Estate.**

5 Proposals

Devising a strategy

118. A 25-year estate strategy is currently in preparation by officials of both Houses, with the eventual aim that it should be agreed by the House of Commons Commission and the equivalent body in the House of Lords following consultation with groups and Committees such as our own.¹¹⁴ **An estate strategy is long overdue. We welcome the recognition by the House Administration that the Estate is an asset which needs to be managed strategically over a longer timescale than other parts of the House’s corporate business.**

119. The strategy will doubtless range more widely than our main concerns and cover issues such as the ongoing works programme and maintaining the value and heritage of the Estate. However, **we recommend that the strategy should set standards for all occupants of accommodation on the Estate and that a programme should be devised for achieving these standards. Those who exercise control over accommodation in practice need to be held accountable for ensuring that these standards are met.**

120. **The strategy will need to establish processes for achieving the efficient use of available accommodation and for dealing with anomalies in its allocation. All office accommodation should be rated to establish a reasonably objective measure of quality for the benefit of both those in occupancy and those responsible for allocation.**

121. Greater transparency over how space is allocated will be an important part of any solution if objective standards are to be applied across the board. Transparency also requires a central up-to-date view of who is supposed to be occupying every room on the Estate. It is extraordinary for any number of reasons, fire safety being perhaps the most prosaic, that there is no single central accurate overview of who exactly is based where on the Estate. The Clerk of the House has suggested that the House Service needs “to have a better database about what is happening in the Members’ accommodation if we are to be regarded as really responsible for running the Estate”.¹¹⁵ But the problem goes beyond Members’ accommodation; the Serjeant is currently not always even informed of changes of use internally within the House Service.¹¹⁶ **We recommend that there is an urgent need for a complete and up-to-date central overview of who is based where on the Estate and the space that they occupy, available to both the Serjeant at Arms and the Accommodation Whips, to allow for properly informed joined-up planning for future accommodation need, and for security and health and safety purposes.**

122. **We recognise that any proposals for further construction or the acquisition of new buildings can only be justified once every effort has been made to use the existing Estate as efficiently as possible.** An Estate Occupancy Study conducted by HOK has identified those staff who might not need to be based at Westminster, and the Trades Union do not seem to be averse to the idea of locating some staff away from Westminster,¹¹⁷ but as there

114 *House of Commons Corporate Business Plan 2006*, p 17

115 Q 119

116 Q 84

117 Qq 141–144

are no current proposals to acquire property elsewhere, the existing study may not be of immediate relevance. **A new study is needed to prioritise occupancy within the existing Estate, to ensure that location, space, quality and layout of accommodation are matched to occupants’ needs as closely as is possible within the constraints of the existing buildings.** The Board of Management has provided information on the staff of the House who currently occupy space in the Palace; this might be a starting point for the study we recommend.¹¹⁸

123. The Serjeant at Arms has told us that “there is currently no space available into which staff of the House could be moved to provide additional accommodation for Members” but he suggests that it may “be possible to identify opportunities to make improvements at the margin by exchanging accommodation between staff and Members”.¹¹⁹ The Clerk of the House has commented to us along similar lines.¹²⁰ A new occupancy study should seek to identify such opportunities on the basis of need. For example, we suspect that Library staff currently based in North Curtain Corridor may not need the accommodation they currently occupy there; but appropriate space for them elsewhere would need to be found if they were to be moved.

124. We have already recommended at paragraph 61 above a thorough review of front-bench accommodation needs within the Estate.

Refurbishing sub-standard accommodation

125. The fact that some Members’ rooms have no natural light has been described by the Opposition Chief Whip as “a disgrace”.¹²¹ Although, as the Serjeant has pointed out, there are in fact overall sufficient Members’ rooms with windows that no Member should need to be in a windowless office,¹²² this does not obviate the need to improve the quality of this accommodation. Members’ staff who are currently working in windowless offices are also finding the conditions a “source of grievance”.¹²³ **The standard of some accommodation on the Estate is unacceptable for full-time office work by anyone, let alone by Members of Parliament. This accommodation needs to be improved, or its use changed, as a matter of urgency. No Members or predominantly desk-based staff should be in windowless accommodation at the beginning of the next Parliament.**

126. There are four areas which give us particular cause for concern, all within the Palace: Upper Committee Corridor North and South, the Lower Ministerial Floor, the Star Chamber Court block, and the Lower Ground Floor Secretaries’ Area.

127. 39 Members’ rooms off the Upper Committee Corridor have long been a cause for concern as, although they are of an acceptable size, they only have small roof-lights and are by the Serjeant’s admission “not suitable in their current condition for long periods of

118 Ev 58 ff.

119 Ev 56

120 Q 92

121 Q 13

122 Q 72

123 Q 176

occupation”.¹²⁴ Some of the rooms are currently vacant or on loan to the House Service, others are occupied by Members as their only accommodation on the Estate, others still have been allocated to Members as a second office for use by Members’ staff. Options for the redevelopment of the area were presented to the Accommodation & Works Committee in 2002, but, because it is not structurally possible to provide proper windows in the windowless rooms, the options necessarily involve decreasing the number of rooms available in the area. This would be likely to exacerbate the pressure for rooms which already exists.

128. An alternative would be to change how the windowless rooms are used, so that rather than being permanent desk-based accommodation, they might be available for storage, for small meetings, for decant accommodation, or as hotdesking accommodation for staff who are not normally desk-based. It might be possible to do this in such a way that other rooms are freed up which would be suitable as permanent accommodation for Members.

129. Six Ministers’ rooms in the internal part of the Lower Ministers’ floor have no natural light at all. A change in how these rooms are used and the consequent freeing up of space elsewhere seems to be the best way forward in this case.

130. 24 Members’ rooms on the Westminster Hall side of the Star Chamber Court block receive very little natural light. It may be difficult to improve the working environment in these rooms, but we would welcome any suggestions as to how this might be achieved.

131. The Lower Ground Floor Secretaries’ area is open-plan and contains 43 desks for Members’ staff. It is the only Members’ staff accommodation in the Palace under the control of the Serjeant at Arms. The area receives very little natural light. We were impressed when we visited by the fact that at least some of those working there value the area as a working environment, but we can only agree with the comment from one occupant that “a modernisation plan of the area to provide more light and brighter surroundings would be welcome—there is too much brown at the moment”.¹²⁵

132. We recommend that refurbishment and redesign of the areas identified in the paragraphs above should be carried out by the end of 2009 at the latest, following consultation with us as to the options available.

Improving Information and Communications Technology

133. In our first Report of this Session, we recommended

that wireless Internet access should be provided in those areas likely to be of most use to Members: the atrium of Portcullis House, the Library and the new Members’ temporary accommodation areas, and that a way should be found of securely providing wireless functionality on centrally supplied laptop computers.¹²⁶

124 Ev 50, para 17

125 Ev 44 (Barbara Stevens)

126 Administration Committee, First Report of Session 2005–06, *Post-Election Services*, HC 777, para 26

In their response to this recommendation, the Board of Management informed us that

Work is already under way to provide wireless access to the Parliamentary Network whilst using Parliamentary equipment. This service will be made available in the locations suggested in the Report in due course and in advance of the next election. PICT is investigating direct wireless access to the internet that would enable Members, and others, to use their own wireless enabled equipment.¹²⁷

134. Although our recommendation was made in the context of working arrangements for new Members of Parliament, its implementation and **the roll-out of wireless access to the Parliamentary Network and to the Internet from within the Parliamentary Estate should also be of use in reducing the demand for fixed workstations for temporary staff and possibly for others as well.**

135. **ICT systems also need to be improved:**

- a) **so that constituency staff are not at a disadvantage compared to their colleagues at Westminster; and**
- b) **to enable electronic file storage to provide opportunities to free up space occupied by paper files and shelving.**

Furnishing offices for Members and their staff

136. We can identify five central principles which any guidance on the provision of furniture for Members' offices should take into account:

- a) Members and their staff should be provided with furniture that suits their working practices.
- b) The furniture provided should not be incompatible with the nature of the building.
- c) The furniture should be designed to occupy the space available as efficiently as possible.
- d) Health and safety requirements must be met.
- e) The cost to the public purse must be contained within an agreed budget.

137. The central provision of standard furniture to Members' offices should in theory lead to cost savings through bulk purchase, but we are not sure that this is in fact what is achieved at the moment. The current prices of individual items of furniture which have been shown to us do not always compare favourably with the prices of similar items available on the high street. This needs to be reviewed. The idea of giving individual Members an allowance to furnish their offices would be impractical to implement because of practical difficulties, such as security of delivery, and the very different sizes and styles of the offices allocated to Members.

¹²⁷ Administration Committee, Second Special Report of Session 2005–06, *Post-Election Services: Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2005–06*, HC 1027, Response, para 11

138. Any guidance on furnishing needs to contain sufficient flexibility to suit Members' different working practices and the different kinds of office they inhabit. **We recommend that, as indicated in the House's Corporate Business Plan, new guidance on furnishing offices for Members and their staff should be drafted by the Serjeant at Arms and brought to us for our endorsement as soon as possible.**

Managing demand for Members' staff accommodation

139. Members' staff numbers constitute the area of greatest uncertainty as far as accommodation is concerned, as well as one of the areas of greatest potential growth. Our recommendations in this area are key to successful management of the Estate.

140. **Members need to be given clearer information on the number of staff they can expect to accommodate at Westminster: up to two. Any space in addition to this that might be allocated to them is a bonus rather than a right.** Members will doubtless continue to attempt to house more than two staff when they do not have the space to do so comfortably; but their discomfort under such circumstances should not justify allocating them more accommodation.

141. There are few incentives available to encourage Members not to site their staff at Westminster, and there are several disincentives, including the need to pay for the rent and upkeep of an office elsewhere and inferior access to the Parliamentary Network. As the Opposition Chief Whip told us,

The problem is that all the facilities are here and no wonder Members want to base their staff here to a degree because you have accommodation, you have phones that you do not pay for, you have photocopiers that you do not pay for and everything else, and those are extra costs.¹²⁸

He has suggested that it is important "to encourage people not to base all their staff here".¹²⁹ But this is unlikely to be easy in an environment in which "there are London Members now who are closing their constituency offices because they cannot afford to pay the rent".¹³⁰

142. **Members who choose to have no staff at Westminster reduce the pressure on facilities and space and some way of rewarding them for doing so should be found.** It would be an inefficient use of the space available to reward them with larger rooms: a Member with two staff clearly needs more space than a Member on their own. But, as we have already mentioned, quality of space is not just about size. **We recommend that Members who choose not to locate any staff at Westminster should in general be compensated for this by being allocated some of the better quality individual rooms of under 20 sq m, focussing on the Palace, where there is less space for Members' staff.**

143. Some Members have acquired more space through informal agreements with other Members, perhaps those who do not need the staff accommodation they have been

128 Q 1 (Mr McLoughlin)

129 *Ibid.*

130 Q 30 (Mr Ainsworth)

allocated. In the interests of transparency and equity, **we recommend that Members should not be allowed to ‘sublet’ for any extended period accommodation which they have been allocated at Westminster to other Members or indeed to anyone else.**

144. According to the Serjeant, 68 Members (including Ministers) currently occupy rooms of above 20 sq m in size on their own; four of these Members are in single occupancy of rooms of above 40 sq m.¹³¹ This is a problem to which it is necessary to “apply a little maths”, as the Clerk of the House has suggested.¹³² If these rooms were more efficiently used, some of the demand from other Members for more space for themselves and their staff could be met from within the existing overall allocation. We accept that these larger rooms will generally be occupied by senior Members who may have been there for some time, and that it may not be possible to change how these rooms are used immediately or in the short term.¹³³ But we encourage an understanding that this kind of occupancy should be considered the exception, not the norm, and should be discouraged. **Given the pressures for space on the Estate, it is not normally appropriate for rooms above 20 sq m to be in occupancy by a single person. This rule applies as much to staff of the House and third-party occupants as it does to Members.**

145. The House provides an allowance to Members for their staffing needs and Short Money to Opposition parties and the Leader of the Opposition as financial assistance in carrying out their parliamentary duties. Members’ staff are registered on the House of Commons payroll. Unpaid staff can also be registered on this payroll. Staff paid from Short Money are not. Some Members currently sponsor people who are paid from other sources, All Party Groups for example, and allow them to use their accommodation at Westminster.¹³⁴ In order to manage demand and in the interests of propriety, **we recommend that permanent Members’ staff desks should only be made available for Members’ staff on the House of Commons payroll and Opposition parties’ parliamentary staff whose salaries are paid from Short Money.**

146. There is currently no process for reallocating a staff desk if the Member who owns it does not make use of it. Members are loath to give up staff desks, because they have no guarantee that desks will be available in the future should they need them. As a result, some staff desks are seriously underused. One of the reasons for the under-use of Members’ staff desks is that there is currently no process for providing temporary desks. Members may need space at Westminster for staff from the constituency for a few days or a few weeks at a time.¹³⁵ Unpaid temporary staff also play an increasingly important role in Members’ offices. Under the circumstances, it is unsurprising that Members hold onto desks which they may only need for a few weeks in every year. **We recommend that a number of Members’ staff desks should be set aside for temporary staff, and a booking system should be put in place to allow Members to use them for that purpose for a limited period at a time. Once this has been done, Members should lose permanent staff desks**

131 Ev 50, Figure 5

132 Q 119 (Clerk of the House)

133 Qq 34, 120

134 Ev 37 (Ann McKechin)

135 Q 173

allocated to them if they fail to ensure that they are used consistently over an agreed period.

147. The Government Accommodation Whip has told us that he would be “absolutely appalled by the thought” of taking over responsibility for allocating Members’ staff desks.¹³⁶ But the Accommodation Whips are in effect already responsible for allocating some of the accommodation used by Members’ staff, and the current split in responsibility for housing Members’ staff between the Whips and the Serjeant’s Department makes it harder to allocate desk space fairly and to ensure that it is used efficiently. **Better co-ordination of Members’ staff accommodation is required, including a proper process for the allocation of desks and regular monitoring of how the desks are used.**

6 Conclusion

148. **The gradually growing number of staff of the House and Members' staff on the Estate set against a static, even slightly decreasing, number of Members is a trend that has been causing friction since at least the early 1980s.**¹³⁷

149. The numbers of staff of the House have increased from 255 in 1960, to 938 in 1988, to more than 1,700 in 2006,¹³⁸ in response to demands from the House, its Committees and Members. Recent growth has been accommodated almost entirely within 7 Millbank, which is now apparently close to capacity, with hot-desking introduced in some Departments to maximise use of the space available.¹³⁹ The number of Members' staff with parliamentary passes has scarcely increased at all since 1988, remaining constant at around 1,300, but a much larger number (1,230) are now provided with desks on the Estate than ever before. These desks are generally in close proximity to Members. Proposals for new staff of the House posts are subject to a business case and must be approved by the House of Commons Commission. The only controls over the numbers of Members' staff on the Estate are limits on the numbers of passes available: if every Member decided to locate three or four staff at Westminster, space would somehow need to be found for these additional 700 staff.

150. **The simple fact is that the Estate, despite the opening of Portcullis House, is again reaching the point at which it can no longer easily accommodate further growth. Demands for any additional staffing for the House Service need to be considered in this context. Control over the number of Members' staff can best be achieved by encouraging Members to locate their staff away from Westminster; but this will only be successful if they can do so economically and in a way which suits their working practices. Currently, some Members find it difficult to afford a constituency office and are tempted to base all their staff within the Estate. In an environment of high office rental costs, to provide more of an equal playing field may require significant targeted incentives. The costs of office accommodation for Members and their staff at Westminster are met in full from the budget for the House of Commons Administration rather than from Members' allowances. Accommodation and related costs for staff located in Members' constituencies might be funded in the same way: this should be investigated.**

151. **It has not been the business of this Report to examine the demand side of accommodation in great detail. There should be a major assessment of exactly how many staff are required by the House itself. The sevenfold growth in numbers of staff of the House from 255 in 1960 to more than 1,700 in 2006, whilst it may reflect many competing pressures, should need to be justified.**

137 Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), Second Report of Session 1987–88, *Access to the Precincts of the House*, HC 580, Minutes of Evidence, p 17

138 *Ibid.*, pp 16–17; Ev 52, Figure 8

139 Qq 62, 91

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

1. We focus unapologetically in this Report on the rights and needs of Members of Parliament, in whose interests the House has appointed us to act. As we will show, the accommodation available for Members has improved dramatically in recent years with the expansion of the Parliamentary Estate into new and refurbished buildings to the north of Bridge Street. Many Members now have adequate office accommodation at Westminster—but some still do not. We examine why this is the case, and we assess the scope for improving both the extent and the quality of the accommodation available. We acknowledge that accommodation is a limited resource, and we suggest ways in which this resource could be used more efficiently. The numbers of staff of the House and Members' staff have grown significantly in recent years: they also have a right to expect decent accommodation, and we consider the extent to which this accommodation can be provided at Westminster without infringing on the justified expectations of Members. (Paragraph 3)

History

2. Thanks to the work of our predecessor Committees and others, the quantity and quality of accommodation available to Members has improved substantially over the last fifteen years. (Paragraph 31)

Occupants and their accommodation needs

3. The Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) in 1991 put forward minimum space standards for Members' offices of 8–10 sq m per person in existing buildings and of 15–20 sq m per person in Portcullis House. HOK more recently has proposed a space standard for a Member's office of 12.5 sq m per person. Both the Committee and HOK have also proposed space standards for Members' staff. The space standards proposed to date are adequate in so far as they go and have largely been met, but sufficient space is only one criterion for adequate accommodation. (Paragraph 41)
4. We believe that all Members if they wish should have sole use of an office located within the secure part of the Parliamentary Estate, whose space, quality, furnishing layout and IT services are up to modern standards. (Paragraph 41)
5. We recommend that no Member should be required to share an office with another Member if they do not wish to do so. (Paragraph 43)
6. We recommend that the Serjeant at Arms with the Government Accommodation Whip should explore Ministers' requirements for accommodation within the precincts of the House and should come back to us with proposals if it seems that these requirements at times of peak demand can be met more economically through innovative use of space. (Paragraph 56)

7. Front-bench accommodation must be provided without encroaching on back-bench allocations. Those needs therefore need to be quantified and boundaries set. A definition must be agreed of who it is appropriate and possible to accommodate on the Estate and who political parties should expect to accommodate elsewhere. Demands for additional space must be realistic given the constraints of the existing Estate and the competing demands for space within it. (Paragraph 61)
8. We and our predecessors have taken the consistent view that Members should have priority over office accommodation in the Palace above those staff of the House with no clear business need to be there. (Paragraph 64)
9. The House Service must recognise that it is in its own interests to occupy no more space than is needed to do its work. (Paragraph 66)
10. A programme for the redevelopment of the Press Gallery area has been agreed between the House of Commons Commission and the Gallery, and we accept that any new proposals for the use of this space should await the completion of this work. (Paragraph 69)
11. We recognise that the houses currently occupied by officials were built as residential accommodation and have historic value as such, and that it may be difficult to find suitable alternative uses for them. However, in our view the provision of residential accommodation at public expense can only be justified by defined business need and should be subject to regular review. (Paragraph 75)
12. We recommend that the Lobby Briefing Room should be made available for booking as a meeting room by other occupants of the Estate, on the understanding that these bookings might have to be moved or cancelled at short notice if the room were required for Lobby briefings. (Paragraph 76)
13. We support the Works of Art Committee's request for a modern climate-controlled secure storage facility for the House of Commons art collection. We recommend that off-site as well as on-site storage options should be explored, given the competing demands for space and priority for refurbishment on the Estate. (Paragraph 80)
14. It is important to continue to explore opportunities to bring into use space which is currently classed as unusable. We recommend that all space currently classed as unusable should be systematically analysed to identify whether it might be brought into use and that the results of this analysis should be brought back to us on a rolling basis as soon as they are available. (Paragraph 83)

Constraints

15. Following a period of recent growth, we have to accept that the Estate is unlikely to expand further to any significant extent during the current planning period. (Paragraph 86)
16. There are legal, practical, aesthetic and historic reasons which mean that it is both difficult and undesirable to make significant alterations to the Palace; but the accommodation within it leaves a great deal to be desired. (Paragraph 88)

17. The gulf between the quality of the Parliamentary ICT service provided in the constituency and that provided at Westminster is a major disincentive to Members locating their staff in the constituency. It also impedes the smooth running of Members' offices and leads to a poorer quality of service for constituents. (Paragraph 94)
18. Within the space currently available, Members should not expect to be able to accommodate more than two members of staff comfortably at Westminster. Members who have been allocated enough space to accommodate more staff than this are in a fortunate position compared to the majority of their colleagues. Some Members will find that they have space for only one member of staff. Those Members who attempt to accommodate more staff in the rooms at their disposal than the space can adequately house must bear in mind the health and safety consequences of doing so. (Paragraph 105)
19. We accept the need for decant accommodation to be preserved to enable maintenance, temporary projects and reorganisation of the occupancy of the Estate. We note, however, that it is not always well understood why offices, sometimes good offices, need to be kept empty when there is demand for this accommodation. We therefore recommend that any decant requirement should be justified and explained to relevant stakeholders, including Members. Accommodation which is used infrequently or irregularly should also be justified. (Paragraph 110)
20. We should make it clear from the outset that in our view there is no realistic alternative to the current system whereby the Whips allocate individual rooms to Members. (Paragraph 112)
21. Where one group of occupants or another claims to need more accommodation, lack of certainty over how accommodation is being used and who it is being used by makes such claims difficult to assess objectively. (Paragraph 113)
22. It is important that the allocation of accommodation to Members of each and every political party should comprise a reasonably equitable cross-section of the rooms available across the Estate. (Paragraph 114)
23. Members' needs for office space vary principally according to the numbers of staff they wish to locate at Westminster. But these needs alone do not explain why some Members have more than six times as much space at their disposal as others. Where Members occupy substandard accommodation, this may be because of a lack of sufficient adequate Members' accommodation; but it may also be because of how the Members' accommodation available has been allocated. (Paragraph 116)
24. The current wide discrepancies in the accommodation allocated to individual Members do not help to make the case that Members may need more overall space on the Estate. (Paragraph 117)

Proposals

25. An estate strategy is long overdue. We welcome the recognition by the House Administration that the Estate is an asset which needs to be managed strategically

over a longer timescale than other parts of the House's corporate business. (Paragraph 118)

26. We recommend that the strategy should set standards for all occupants of accommodation on the Estate and that a programme should be devised for achieving these standards. Those who exercise control over accommodation in practice need to be held accountable for ensuring that these standards are met. (Paragraph 119)
27. The strategy will need to establish processes for achieving the efficient use of available accommodation and for dealing with anomalies in its allocation. All office accommodation should be rated to establish a reasonably objective measure of quality for the benefit of both those in occupancy and those responsible for allocation. (Paragraph 120)
28. We recommend that there is an urgent need for a complete and up-to-date central overview of who is based where on the Estate and the space that they occupy, available to both the Serjeant at Arms and the Accommodation Whips, to allow for properly informed joined-up planning for future accommodation need, and for security and health and safety purposes. (Paragraph 121)
29. We recognise that any proposals for further construction or the acquisition of new buildings can only be justified once every effort has been made to use the existing Estate as efficiently as possible. (Paragraph 122)
30. A new study is needed to prioritise occupancy within the existing Estate, to ensure that location, space, quality and layout of accommodation are matched to occupants' needs as closely as is possible within the constraints of the existing buildings. (Paragraph 122)
31. The standard of some accommodation on the Estate is unacceptable for full-time office work by anyone, let alone by Members of Parliament. This accommodation needs to be improved, or its use changed, as a matter of urgency. No Members or predominantly desk-based staff should be in windowless accommodation at the beginning of the next Parliament. (Paragraph 125)
32. We recommend that refurbishment and redesign of the areas identified in the paragraphs above should be carried out by the end of 2009 at the latest, following consultation with us as to the options available. (Paragraph 132)
33. The roll-out of wireless access to the Parliamentary Network and to the Internet from within the Parliamentary Estate should be of use in reducing the demand for fixed workstations for temporary staff and possibly for others as well. (Paragraph 134)
34. ICT systems also need to be improved:
 - a) so that constituency staff are not at a disadvantage compared to their colleagues at Westminster; and
 - b) to enable electronic file storage to provide opportunities to free up space occupied by paper files and shelving. (Paragraph 135)

35. We recommend that, as indicated in the House's Corporate Business Plan, new guidance on furnishing offices for Members and their staff should be drafted by the Serjeant at Arms and brought to us for our endorsement as soon as possible. (Paragraph 138)
36. Members need to be given clearer information on the number of staff they can expect to accommodate at Westminster: up to two. Any space in addition to this that might be allocated to them is a bonus rather than a right. (Paragraph 140)
37. Members who choose to have no staff at Westminster reduce the pressure on facilities and space and some way of rewarding them for doing so should be found. (Paragraph 142)
38. We recommend that Members who choose not to locate any staff at Westminster should in general be compensated for this by being allocated some of the better quality individual rooms of under 20 sq m, focussing on the Palace, where there is less space for Members' staff. (Paragraph 142)
39. We recommend that Members should not be allowed to 'sublet' for any extended period accommodation which they have been allocated at Westminster to other Members or indeed to anyone else. (Paragraph 143)
40. Given the pressures for space on the Estate, it is not normally appropriate for rooms above 20 sq m to be in occupancy by a single person. This rule applies as much to staff of the House and third-party occupants as it does to Members. (Paragraph 144)
41. We recommend that permanent Members' staff desks should only be made available for Members' staff on the House of Commons payroll and Opposition parties' parliamentary staff whose salaries are paid from Short Money. (Paragraph 145)
42. We recommend that a number of Members' staff desks should be set aside for temporary staff, and a booking system should be put in place to allow Members to use them for that purpose for a limited period at a time. Once this has been done, Members should lose permanent staff desks allocated to them if they fail to ensure that they are used consistently over an agreed period. (Paragraph 146)
43. Better co-ordination of Members' staff accommodation is required, including a proper process for the allocation of desks and regular monitoring of how the desks are used. (Paragraph 147)

Conclusion

44. The gradually growing number of staff of the House and Members' staff on the Estate set against a static, even slightly decreasing, number of Members is a trend that has been causing friction since at least the early 1980s. (Paragraph 148)
45. The simple fact is that the Estate, despite the opening of Portcullis House, is again reaching the point at which it can no longer easily accommodate further growth. Demands for any additional staffing for the House Service need to be considered in this context. Control over the number of Members' staff can best be achieved by encouraging Members to locate their staff away from Westminster; but this will only

be successful if they can do so economically and in a way which suits their working practices. Currently, some Members find it difficult to afford a constituency office and are tempted to base all their staff within the Estate. In an environment of high office rental costs, to provide more of an equal playing field may require significant targeted incentives. The costs of office accommodation for Members and their staff at Westminster are met in full from the budget for the House of Commons Administration rather than from Members' allowances. Accommodation and related costs for staff located in Members' constituencies might be funded in the same way: this should be investigated. (Paragraph 150)

46. It has not been the business of this Report to examine the demand side of accommodation in great detail. There should be a major assessment of exactly how many staff are required by the House itself. The sevenfold growth in numbers of staff of the House from 255 in 1960 to more than 1,700 in 2006, whilst it may reflect many competing pressures, should need to be justified. (Paragraph 151)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 27 June 2006

Members present:

Mr Frank Doran, in the Chair

Mr Bob Ainsworth
Derek Conway
Frank Dobson
Mr Brian H Donohoe

Helen Jones
Mr Kevan Jones
Mr Andrew Robathan
Pete Wishart

* * *

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report [*House of Commons Accommodation*], proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraph 1 read and agreed to.

A paragraph—(*Frank Dobson*)—brought up, read the first and second time, and inserted (now paragraph 2).

Paragraphs 2 to 9 (now 3 to 10) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 10 (now 11) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 11 to 19 (now 12 to 20) read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 20 to 22 (now 21 to 23) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 23 to 29 (now 24 to 30) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 30 (now 31) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 31 to 39 (now 32 to 40) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 40 (now 41) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 41 to 46 (now 42 to 47) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 47 (now 48) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 48 to 51 (now 49 to 52) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 52 (now 53) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 53 and 54 (now 54 and 55) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 55 (now 56) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 56 to 58 (now 57 to 59) read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 59 and 60 (now 60 and 61) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 61 and 62 (now 62 and 63) agreed to.

Paragraph 63 (now 64) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 64 to 68 (now 65 to 69) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 69 (now 70) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 70 to 73 (now 71 to 74) read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 74 and 75 (now 75 and 76) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 76 to 88 (now 77 to 89) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 89 (now 90) read, amended and agreed to.

A paragraph—(*Mr Brian H Donohoe*)—brought up, read the first and second time, and inserted (now paragraph 91).

Paragraphs 90 and 91 (now 92 and 93) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 92 (now 94) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 93 to 95 (now 95 to 97) read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 96 and 97 (now 98 and 99) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 98 to 104 (now 100 to 106) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 105 (now 107) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 106 to 111 (now 108 to 113) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 112 (now 114) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 113 to 118 (now 115 to 120) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 119 (now 121) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 120 to 134 (now 122 to 136) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 135 (now 137) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 136 to 139 (now 138 to 141) read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 140 and 141 (now 142 to 143) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 142 and 143 (now 144 and 145) read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 144 and 145 read, amended, combined and agreed to (now paragraph 146).

Paragraphs 146 to 148 (now 147 to 149) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 149 (now 150) read, amended and agreed to.

A paragraph—(*Andrew Robathan*)—brought up, read the first and second time, and added (now paragraph 151).

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report, as amended, be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

Several papers were ordered to be appended to the Minutes of Evidence.

Ordered, That part of the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee on 25 April and 9 May, together with Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence, be reported to the House.

Several papers were ordered to be reported to the House.

* * *

[Adjourned till Tuesday 11th July at half-past Three o'clock.]

List of witnesses

Tuesday 25 April 2006

Rt Hon Bob Ainsworth , Government Deputy Chief Whip,	Ev 1
Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin , Opposition Chief Whip, and Sir Robert Smith , formerly Liberal Democrat Accommodation Whip, Members of the House	
Mr Peter Grant Peterkin , Serjeant at Arms, Mr Paul Monaghan , Director of Estates, and Mr Greg Unwin , HOK International Ltd	Ev 10

Tuesday 9 May 2006

Sir Roger Sands KCB (then Mr Roger Sands), Clerk of the House and Chief Executive of the House of Commons Service	Ev 20
Dr Chris Pond OBE , President, and Ms Anne Foster , Administrator, House of Commons Trade Union Side	Ev 26
Mr Greg Hurst , Hon Secretary, Parliamentary Press Gallery, Mr Michael White , <i>The Guardian</i> , and Mr Nick Assinder , Hon Secretary, Press Lobby	Ev 28
Ms Gill Cheeseman , President, Secretaries' and Assistants' Council, and Mr Kevin Flack , Secretary, Transport & General Workers' Union Parliamentary Staff Branch	Ev 31

Where a passage of Oral or Written Evidence has not been reported, this is denoted by asterisks.

List of written evidence

Memoranda submitted by witnesses

1	Serjeant at Arms	Ev 47, 55, 55
2	HOK International Ltd	Ev 58
3	Clerk of the House	Ev 58
4	House of Commons Trade Union Side	Ev 45
5	Parliamentary Press Gallery	Ev 46
6	Transport and General Workers' Union, Parliamentary Staff Branch	Ev 46

Memoranda submitted by other representative bodies

7	Advisory Committee on Works of Art	Ev 45
8	House of Commons Health and Safety Committee	Ev 46
9	Public and Commercial Services Union, House of Commons Branch	Ev 47

Memoranda submitted by individual Members

10	Adam Afriyie	Ev 34
11	Nick Ainger	Ev 34
12	Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods	Ev 35
13	Mr Jonathan Djanogly	Ev 35
14	Mr Philip Dunne	Ev 35
15	Paul Flynn	Ev 36
16	Mr Nick Gibb	Ev 36
17	Helen Goodman	Ev 36
18	John Hemming	Ev 36
19	Kelvin Hopkins	Ev 36
20	Mr George Howarth	Ev 37
21	Alan Johnson	Ev 37
22	Mr David Jones	Ev 37
23	Susan Kramer	Ev 37
24	Ann McKechin	Ev 37
25	Mr Denis MacShane	Ev 38
26	Mr Robert Marshall-Andrews	Ev 38
27	Julie Morgan	Ev 38
28	Kali Mountford	Ev 38
29	Mr Keith Simpson	Ev 39
30	Anne Snelgrove	Ev 39
31	Mr Andrew Slaughter	Ev 39
32	Geraldine Smith	Ev 39
33	Dr Gavin Strang	Ev 40
34	Jo Swinson	Ev 40
35	Mr Andrew Turner	Ev 40
36	Mr Shailesh Vara and Mr Rob Wilson	Ev 41
37	Derek Wyatt	Ev 41

Memoranda submitted by individual Members' staff

38	A Member's spouse	Ev 41
39	Joy Greenfield	Ev 42
40	Mette Kjaerby	Ev 42
41	Matthew Korris	Ev 42
42	Kari Mawhood	Ev 42
43	Ann Palmer	Ev 43
44	John Slinger	Ev 43
45	Rebecca Smith	Ev 43
46	Barbara Stevens	Ev 44

Memoranda submitted by individual House of Commons staff

47	Jenny Douglas	Ev 44
48	Alex Fuller	Ev 44

Where a passage of Oral or Written Evidence has not been reported, this is denoted by asterisks.

Administration Committee Reports in this Parliament

Session 2005–06

First Special Report	Publication of summary records of discussion and committee papers	HC 659
First Report	Post-election services	HC 777 (<i>HC 1027</i>)
Second Report	Refreshment Department services	HC 733 (<i>HC 1146</i>)

Responses to Administration Committee Reports are published as Special Reports from the Committee. They are listed above in brackets by HC No. after the report they relate to.

Oral evidence

Taken before the Administration Committee

on Tuesday 25 April 2006

Members present:

Mr Frank Doran, in the Chair

Mr Bob Ainsworth
Derek Conway
Frank Dobson
Mr Brian H Donohoe
Mr Neil Gerrard

Mr Mark Harper
Mr Kevan Jones
David Lepper
John Thurso
Pete Wishart

Witnesses: **Rt Hon Bob Ainsworth MP**, Government Deputy Chief Whip, **Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin MP**, Opposition Chief Whip, and **Sir Robert Smith MP**, formerly Liberal Democrat Accommodation Whip, Members of the House, gave evidence in private.

Q1 Chairman: Welcome gentlemen and thank you for coming along to give evidence today, and welcome also to Mr Sanders, I gather you are taking on the responsibility of Liberal Democrat Accommodation Whip. Before I open it up to questions I do not know if anyone has any opening remarks or points they want to make to us before we start?

Mr Ainsworth: I would like to make some brief remarks, Chair. First of all, on this issue that has been raised in the various representations in evidence as to who should do this job—is it properly a job for the Whips' Office or should it be taken away and done by someone else—let me just say to the Committee that it is not a job that I particularly enjoy but I have tried to think, ever since I have had responsibility for it, and since I was in the Whips' Office before I had personal responsibility for it, who else could and should this job. I have to say that it is extremely difficult to think of who else is capable of doing it, and indeed the Labour Whips' Office took it away from a specific Accommodation Whip because of the problems that we had and gave it to the Deputy Chief Whip some years ago. There is nothing that excites Members more than their accommodation, and you all know personally of the kind of difficulties that Judy Scott Thomson has with Members when she is dealing with two controversial areas, one of which is staff accommodation and the other one is furniture, and look at the bother that that fairly robust lady has in dealing with Members. Give her the Members' accommodation itself, or anybody else, and you can imagine the difficulties they would have. While I am saying that, I would like to say that I think she is due for retirement, I understand, very soon, and I know she is not the most widely loved member of staff in the House but I find that she does a robust job to the benefit of Members and has done over a long period of time, and that is hard to understand until you actually work in this area. But there is a need for somebody with something about them. So if the Committee does contemplate taking this job away from the Whips they had better think very seriously about

who they want to give it to and whether or not anybody else is capable of doing it because I frankly cannot see it myself. There are also some issues in the papers about Ministerial accommodation and I see that the Board, in their submission, raise the under-use of Ministerial accommodation. I have to say—and I say it fairly robustly—that I think the Board has done that as part of a smokescreen because they know that Members are concerned that there are Members of the Administration in this place who enjoy better accommodation than some Members do. Broadly speaking, with the exception of, if you like, the grand positions, Ministers do not enjoy salubrious accommodation in the House of Commons. I do not believe that they did under the Conservative regime; they do not under the Labour regime. Generally speaking, when you get made a Minister you get thrown out of whatever accommodation you get and if you are a Junior Minister you get put into a cubbyhole. That does not hurt the Minister as much as it hurts the staff of the Minister sometimes, and sometimes because the Minister has more staff than will fit into the cubbyhole it does give rise to some small anomalies because you have to try to find ways and means around that problem. But I always take the view that Ministers have grand offices in their departments, they do not need grand offices here and they therefore have to give way to Members of Parliament, for whom the accommodation in the House is their main accommodation. However, to suggest that Ministers can do without—when you listen to the Board's submission, giving the impression that they think that they can—a place in the House I think is naïve beyond belief. Ministers may not work in their offices all day but invariably they are there in the evenings; they have Red Boxes being delivered there; they have to make private telephone calls and they are slaving away in their little cells for the most part. The other thing that I wanted to say about the main report we have here is that I think we have to be very careful about getting into, if we are not careful, some naïve solutions that are not necessarily there. I see that it is flagged up

that we do not appreciate the capability of working from home; we have an office-led attitude towards our place of work. We all know the problems that we have, not only working from home but working from constituencies as well. The IT backup in this place is scandalously poor and it is very, very difficult to work from outside of the House. If the House Authorities could get their act together so that we had proper facilities in order to work away that might be a different area, but to suggest that there are easy ways of moving Ministers or Members of Parliament out of offices to work away from home then you would have to be able to provide new IT equipment in a little less time than the year it has taken to replace mine since the last election, and we would have to be able to have it operating at speeds at which it clearly does not operate at the moment. You would have to change the whole dimension of the backup that you actually give to Members of Parliament. I think that the Administration Committee has to look seriously at improving accommodation for Members in the House. It is an area that needs to be worked on. We still have Members—one or two, not too many—who are in small, windowless accommodation and it is a scandalous situation which I think we ought to seek to improve.

Mr McLoughlin: I echo quite a lot of what Bob has just said. I did the job of sorting out accommodation for about eight years and during that period I was lucky enough with Keith Hill to secure Norman Shaw South as a building for Members of Parliament. Originally that was not going to be Members of Parliament, it was going to be for the Clerks' Department and there was a bit of to-ing and fro-ing as to who should have that particular building. In the end it was agreed that we, as Members, would have it. I think the truth of the matter is that if there were 500 offices all of equal size or Portcullis House could accommodate 500 or 600 Members then every Member would have the same accommodation and there would be no question about it, it would be easy to do. But unfortunately that is not the case we are in and therefore there are going to be some people with better offices than others and somebody has to decide who is going to have those offices. I think there is, I am afraid, part of the fact that the more senior you are here the better office you are likely to get. In the main it works that way—I can see Mr Dobson may have a problem with his accommodation at the moment! I do not want to trespass on that ground; there will be some other of my colleagues that would be likely saying the same thing. I would like, however, to echo what Bob has said about Judy Scott Thomson because there has always been an equivalent Judy Scott Thomson ***. So I think Judy has been very, very approachable through two General Elections. Of course, the difficulty does come when you get significant changes at a General Election because that is when the allocation of offices becomes a bit more problematic. If you take the last General Election, I did not necessarily want Bob to give me all the windowless offices that he could have dispersed and I wanted a fair share of the variety of

accommodation that was available, and there is no doubt it caused problems. I think the other thing is that we have, whether we like it or not—and people may have different views on this—substantially increased the resources available to Members of Parliament. What we have not done is substantially increased the amount of staff accommodation available to Members of Parliament. I have been in the House for almost 20 years and when I first arrived here Members of Parliament got £13,000 for everything. We are now getting £85,000 basically for staff, £20,000 for an IEP budget and we do not even buy our own computers. One of the things I have always tried to suggest that we do is to encourage people not to base all their staff here. Parliament only sits for 180 days a year and yet a lot of Members of Parliament still try and base all their staff here. I would also re-echo, as someone who does not have their main Parliamentary staff based here, that the backup to the constituency offices is still appalling, and the new rollout of these new computers is beyond a joke as to the time it is taking to get some of the things transferred across. The problem is that all the facilities are here and no wonder Members want to base their staff here to a degree because you have accommodation, you have phones that you do not pay for, you have photocopiers that you do not pay for and everything else, and those are extra costs. That is where in the Top Salaries Review Report last time we did make an allowance for that because we said that Members ought to be able to use a certain amount of their staffing allowance to base themselves in constituencies, but I am afraid that the computer backup is still so appalling that any Member who takes on extra responsibilities would probably have to have somebody else, an extra employee, to try and look after the computers. I would like to draw the attention of the Committee to the Accommodation Inquiry evidence from the Serjeant. I think it is fascinating that staff of the House offices have 22% of the accommodation and Members' and Members' staff offices account for 34% of the accommodation. I do not quite know how support services, for instance, at 16%, is broken down into who and what support services are; and third parties, 6%; Members' support, 5%. So I do not think we necessarily get an overall fair view. I have had a number of people and letters—and I know have been sent to you, Mr Chairman—talking about where the Post Office is; the Post Office has been allocated and what has happened to that sort of accommodation. So I think there are a number of issues there. It would be nice to find a great system that meant everybody was satisfied with their office accommodation; but I do not think we are going to find such a system and although the present system may not be perfect I think it would be hard to improve upon it.

Sir Robert Smith: I would first like to echo the thanks to Judy Scott Thomson, who I know individual Members may have had dealings with obviously in dealing directly with accommodation, but who, in terms of working with the Accommodation Whips and facilitating their work in terms of resources and advice, has been extremely

helpful. Patrick is right that this is not a uniform building, it is not a brand new building, it has a variety of offices and spaces to be used. But actually even if it had been uniform we do not have uniform MPs, we do not have uniform lifestyles or uniform ways of wanting to work either, and so there is a bit of mix and matching to be done, which maybe whips round some of the rough edges of the different accommodation and different people's way of working. Certainly in our case seniority has been the only way. Occasionally the party debates whether to find another route but past Accommodation Whips have preferred seniority to having to actually make the decision themselves as to who is going to get what, but if there is some kind of objective rule that they can point to and manage the intake at each election then I think that does facilitate it. I think from the point of view of the Liberal Democrats, in this report here, it is not just the staff accommodation problem but possibly the resource accommodation problems: the party's short money has increased, the need for more space for its resource centre and obviously the party has increased in strength here, but the increasing responsibility on the Leader's Office and the resources necessarily available to support that Leader's Office is now under strain within the current allocation and it may be something that the Accommodation Committee has to look at as to how those other facilities are located to the parties as well as the general allocation of Members' desks and staff desks. But I would echo the same point, that the barrier now, the trouble for people who do not have large space is accommodating the staff support and I would echo Patrick, that if anything can be done to level the playing field with constituency offices I think would help with accommodation.

Q2 Mr Donohoe: Can I ask you, Robert, as you have just spoken, if you think that the Liberals get a fair share of allocation of offices against the other parties?

Sir Robert Smith: I think there is a concern about the allocation, as I say, for those facilities that support the other infrastructure of the parties, the Leader's Office and the resource centre. We used to be within the Palace of Westminster until the building we were in fell down and then we were moved to Abbey Gardens for our resource centre. That has not been able to grow because the House Authorities want to use that for decant accommodation and there is a demand there for some extra space.

Q3 Mr Donohoe: If you were to take your own Members and the Members themselves and the accommodation that they have, do you think that the Liberals get a fair allocation of offices among that of the other parties?

Sir Robert Smith: Reasonably fair in the overall allocation of place, but because of the history of how the building has been allocated those who maybe would like to be closer to the Chamber miss out because you do not get the same ratio within the

actual Palace; but within the other buildings we then get the ratio that helps to counteract that in terms of overall space.

Q4 Mr Donohoe: What about you, Patrick?

Mr McLoughlin: I would like more; I do not have enough.

Q5 Mr Donohoe: Patrick, have you ever sat down and tried to go through the Estate plans and work out what your allocation is against that of the other parties, because there is nothing in the paperwork here? I have tried to find something within the paperwork that shows that there is an allocation of 10,000 square metres to you, 12,000 to Labour and 4,000 to the Liberals and there is nothing here that suggests that. Have you ever done anything or have any of your predecessors?

Mr McLoughlin: There is some paper around that does that, so I am surprised if the Committee has not seen it. There are certainly some documents available that do that, and I think the old Accommodation and Works Committee did see that. I think the trouble with doing it on square footage, if I may just say so, square footage in a way is not the best way to do it because there are some offices which are very grand and very smart and there are some that are very dingy, but people may be prepared to go into them because they are bigger offices although they are dingy.

Q6 Mr Donohoe: Patrick, just to treat it on the basis of a star system, if you were to rate it, as in an hotel business, from five star to three star, we can then extrapolate from that and work out whether or not it is fairly done. I did that in a previous situation. Has that ever been done, as far as you are aware?

Mr McLoughlin: Yes, to a degree.

Q7 Mr Donohoe: What was it?

Mr McLoughlin: To a degree it was not unfair to the parties.

Q8 Mr Donohoe: Was it unfair to your party?

Mr McLoughlin: No, it was generally overall fairly done.

Q9 Mr Donohoe: What about you, Bob?

Mr Ainsworth: There were some figures done at the time of the General Election. Let me say, there was an intervention by the House Authorities at the time of the General Election which added to the length of time it took us to allocate offices and put me in a very difficult position. Because you are absolutely right, I think in the past the Conservative Party has done it to us, dumped the poorer accommodation on us as the shifting electoral fortunes have occurred. But the House Authorities this time made an intervention and suggested that that ought not to be done that way, and that obviously found favour with both Patrick and Robert and I found myself in a very difficult position to be able to stand out against it. They did some figures at that time that effectively wound up with me trying to move people out of their existing offices because of that proposal, which

proved to be enormously difficult, as you plainly remember. I am not so sure that we have a fair allocation. I think that Patrick has done a superb job on behalf of his party over the years and I have nothing but admiration for him. First of all, there are a few things that have happened over a period of time. The old allocations on the basis of positions have gone away, have they not—the Administration Committee Chair, the Catering Committee Chair, there is no office allocation for those people now, and most of those happen to have fallen to the Conservative Party rather than to the Labour Party because of who was in office at the time that the system changed. Patrick also has—and this will create problems the other side of any change of power that could come at some General Election at some time in the future—a very good opposition facility now, and within our allocation I do not know how we could ever create such a facility. So I think Patrick has done a superb job over a period of time and has more than his share of the grand offices in the House and he has a fair share in the other buildings and he is a man much to be admired, but probably at our expense and the other parties’!

Q10 Mr Donohoe: What you are saying on the basis of this evidence, that we should be looking more closely as a Committee at that and try to do something more to refine it, to make it look as though it is more open in terms of having a five star office or four star, whatever, and not by allocation. One of the things you will recall because you came in at the same time as me, 1992, was we were told that when Portcullis House was brought into being it was going to overcome all these problems, but I feel there has been a significant shift in the occupancy within Portcullis House. At the last election people were told that they were to get out of their offices because obviously the Opposition wanted a whole floor of Portcullis House, and so that must have in some part skewed the figures as far as the occupancy of Portcullis House.

Mr Ainsworth: Portcullis House is allocated on a fair basis and that is what caused the difficulty. We lost seats at the last election and therefore the House Authorities came up with the proposal, which was supported by Patrick and supported by Robert, that we ought to give up a share of Portcullis House, and we did, and that created a lot of difficulties for us. But Portcullis House is allocated on a fair basis.

Sir Robert Smith: Can I just say that one of the things that made the difficulty is the historic decision with a new building to try and get all the parties together, and maybe if the decision had been X number of offices change hands but it ends up more like Norman Shaw North, where it is a complete jigsaw—

Q11 Mr Donohoe: I have a final question, if I may, in a more general sense. One of the Members—I think it was Ann McKechin—made mention of the fact that she had been promised that the office she was in was going to be decorated. What input, if any, do you have in this? What is the democratic input? I Parliament Street, for instance, looks tired, it needs

investment in it, and is there anything that you do or should there be anything that you do collectively or as an individual to try to do something in terms of the health and safety obligation?

Mr Ainsworth: That is your job as the Administration Committee.

Q12 Mr Donohoe: So you would not be bothered with that aspect?

Mr McLoughlin: That is the fabric of the House; that is the House maintenance programme, is it not? It is not for us.

Q13 Derek Conway: I have some sympathy with the Whips’ evidence as to what system would work. One of the things that intrigues me—and I have never got to the bottom of it—is the system between the re-designation of rooms between what is a room for a Member of Parliament and what is a room for somebody else. Some figures that the Board have put before the Committee and the witnesses show that there are 721 rooms nominally for Members of Parliament but only 646 Members of Parliament. I wondered if the balance of those rooms had been reallocated by the Whips to other people—the researchers, the secretaries, whatever—or whether that is just the House doing that? Secondly, whether the Whips themselves are consulted when offices are changed for Officers of the House? For example, the rooms behind the Chamber used to be occupied by Members of Parliament; Geoffrey Howe had a room that the Librarian is now in. I have never got to the bottom of who decided that that would no longer be an MP’s room and would become a room for an Officer of the House. Can I ask if the Whips are consulted about this by the House officials in any way?

Mr Ainsworth: There are a couple of anomalies that lead towards the figures that are in that. First of all, we lost some seats at the last election and I have not yet given up any accommodation on the basis of that, but what I have done—it is still on my books—is I have lent it out to the House for all kinds of things, and it was my intention to take it off. I have been loath to give it over to the House until I got my own accommodation in shape and my own Members out of the small windowless rooms on the Upper Committee Corridor. So I have been hanging on to it but allowing other people to use it, so it is not a case of inefficiency. Other of Patrick’s Members have used it on a temporary basis, House Authorities have used it and I have just allowed people to move in and everything else but I have kept it and I have not given it up yet. So that is part of the figures. There are also, as I have said, some anomalies where you have Members with two offices, and that is because when they have been made a Minister and they have had what we describe as “less than desirable” accommodation, let us say over in Norman Shaw North, and I have wound up allocating them some tiny little office as a Minister in the official accommodation I have not chucked them out of Norman Shaw North because nobody else particularly wanted it and their staff were up to their eyeballs over there. So there will be some Members

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with dual offices. There are one or two anomalies in the system. I cannot quite get it up to those figures though and I do not quite understand the gap.

Mr McLoughlin: One of the things I think is a disgrace is that we are still allocating Members of Parliament to rooms where there is no natural light and I think it is a disgrace to allocate them to Members of Parliament. We have managed above the tearoom to actually substantially improve those rooms above the tearoom; there used to be two corridors down there and a lot of people had no light, and I would very much hope—and I made the point in a question to the House of Commons Commission on the floor of the House—that we should during this Parliament set ourselves a target that at the next General Election no Member of Parliament will be allocated a room for him that did not have natural light, and I think that would be a very positive move if the Committee could put that as a recommendation and get the Officers of the House working on proposals, so that that does not happen come the next General Election because we are already a year on. We are perhaps three or four years, certainly no more than four years away from the next General Election and I would certainly like to see that personally as a recommendation. Just on Portcullis House, it was originally stated that each of the corner rooms that overlooked this corner here were going to be tea areas and I said right at the beginning that I did not want the tea area and I wanted it making into an office. At the time there was a certain Member of Parliament who put down in the Parliamentary Questions attacking us for doing that because it cost an extra £4000. Since we have done it other people have cottoned on to the job and it has cost a lot more than the £4000 when it was being originally constructed. Those are the ways in which we looked at accommodation, I would say, to try and find extra accommodation on the site and to use it, because I am very much aware myself that there are a lot of Members in what I would call substandard accommodation and still in substandard accommodation, and the way around that is to actually find more decent accommodation.

Q14 Derek Conway: Could I ask the Whips, do they think the way that the House is developing now that Select Committee Chairmen are being paid, whether or not there is a case, if that is merited, for the sort of titular heads of these Committees to be co-located with the clerks who run that particular Committee, as some Select Committee Chairmen have been talking about? In addition to that could the Whips tell us whether they have a view about whether the Foreign Affairs Committee staff and the Select Committee staff who are still on this corridor require to be in this building rather than located elsewhere?

Mr McLoughlin: It is very grand accommodation. Whether they need to be here is something presumably for the Administration Committee to take a view on. I do not think I would like to take a view on it. It is very smart accommodation but not being a Member of that Select Committee I would not like to say. I think it is Defence and Foreign Affairs, is it not?

Mr Ainsworth: I am not sure about the need for Select Committee Chairs to co-locate their staff. It would be enormously difficult with the changes of membership to do that. Most Select Committee Chairs have reasonable accommodation; they are, in the main, senior Members and the fact that—and I am sure the other parties do the same—they are Select Committee Chairs you take that into account when trying to find something for them, that they have those additional duties to carry out—they may have meetings and everything else—and you make sure that they get an office that is big enough, that has the facilities to enable them to do the job. I think one of the things that grates with me is that there are Members of, let us say, medium seniority in pretty poor accommodation, and there are staff of the House who enjoy a lot better accommodation than those Members, and I think that the Administration Committee ought to be looking to make sure that Members are properly catered for.

Q15 Pete Wishart: I want to talk about allocations and I think you are also edging towards saying that allocation of offices is based on seniority. Would that be a correct assumption about how you do your job?

Mr McLoughlin: In the main but there will be some Members who have special needs, for whatever reason. They may find themselves with exceptionally good accommodation which may be the envy of other people, but they have exceptional needs and that is why they are thus given that kind of accommodation. So I would not want to say that it was all done on seniority, but that is a guide.

Q16 Pete Wishart: That is helpful because what I sense by reading some of the evidence that has been given to us and the written evidence is the frustration with the transparency of this. If it is seniority I think it is best to say that, or what is the criteria of allocation. I think there has to be that type of clarity, and I think that Members have a right to expect what sort of accommodation should you therefore get in your second term, what should you therefore expect to get in your third term. I think if we were to put forward that type of transparency about what Members should expect to have in terms of accommodation, would that be a useful thing so that people know what they could roughly expect?

Mr Ainsworth: I think it would be very hard to do and it is not as simple as that. What Robert said about every Member is different as well as the shape and grandeur of every office is different.

Q17 Pete Wishart: But would you agree that there should be some sort of criteria, that Members have an expectation to look at that?

Mr Ainsworth: There is an ideal for that but you have to take seniority, needs and sometimes—although the Committee might not like this word—you have to take status into account as well, and it is very difficult to be transparent about how you mesh those. There is one Member who has written to the Committee complaining about his allocation of office and he is a fairly senior Labour Member who

wanted an office next door to where he was that was twice the size of that which he had. Basically, if you go and look at his office it is like a garage—what he needs is a garage, he does not need a big office, he has so much stuff climbing up the wall he needs a garage. When you look at the numbers of staff that people have and what they are actually using their office for, you have to try and get your head around whether or not there is a genuine need.

Q18 Pete Wishart: That concerns me a little because what we are getting here is you guys deciding who has status and who has seniority; it is solely you and you are not getting any assistance from anybody else. It is the Whips of the parties who are deciding this criteria and you are deciding who should get allocation. Seniority we can all understand, one term, two terms, three terms. Now we are getting into areas of status if people are to be given offices. Is there not a temptation to punish recalcitrant Members and give them substandard offices and reward those who are the loyalists?

Mr McLoughlin: It comes down, if I could say, Mr Chairman, to how do you define seniority? If you define seniority solely on the basis of length of service that is a criteria you could use.

Q19 Pete Wishart: But that is straightforward. You are deciding seniority and status.

Mr McLoughlin: I am not so sure that you can solely judge, and I am not prepared to say that you can solely judge seniority on length of service.

Q20 Pete Wishart: That really reflects my central question. You guys are deciding these things on seniority and status.

Sir Robert Smith: If I can just clarify? We do tend to go mainly on seniority, but it would be difficult to say what kind of accommodation you would expect because it would depend on the turnover and also again on what people want to give up or whether people want to move, because actually you can have a very senior person who, most objective observers would say, should be moving to better accommodation, who decides that the disruption of moving is not worth the candle and they stay where they are.

Mr Ainsworth: Can I mention some of the complexities? Let us say that the Prime Minister had a reshuffle and both the Home Secretary and the Foreign Secretary lost their jobs. The Foreign Secretary has been a Member of Parliament for a very, very long time and the Home Secretary for not as long as me. I would seek, I would want to provide some decent accommodation for both of those individuals and I think having been a Secretary of State who has come out of this grand and salubrious accommodation over at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office it would be a hard blow if I sought to put that individual in a cubbyhole. I would not necessarily want to say, “Oh, one has been here since the 1970s, one has only been here since the 1990s”, so it is more than just years and there are a lot of complexities.

Q21 Pete Wishart: One last thing, Chair, if I may? The windowless offices. I have done an investigation of my own and in my examination I looked along Upper Committee Corridor North in the windowless offices and the only Members who are now in windowless offices up on Committee Corridor North are minority party Members. One hundred% of our new SNP Members are in windowless offices, 100% of new SDLP Members have windowless offices. Can anybody tell me the percentage of Conservative and Labour Members in windowless offices—new Members?

Mr Ainsworth: I have two Members, I think, in windowless offices.

Q22 Pete Wishart: That is one hundred% of our new Members in windowless offices and I find that unacceptable.

Mr McLoughlin: In fairness you are playing with figures. If you only have one or two new Members it is possible to make percentages look grand. I cannot give you the answer. I have not been doing this job now for five months and I have not missed it very much, but I would like to see us move and actually have a resolution to say that nobody will be in those offices, irrespective of whether it is 100% or whatever; I would like to see nobody in those offices.

Q23 Mr Harper: Since other Members have commented on the method of dishing out the offices I think I am tempted to agree with the testimony so far, that having the Whips do it is probably, in Winston Churchill’s definition of democracy, the worst system apart from all the others. I do not think that there is a way, given the multifarious nature of the accommodation on this Estate, that any individual is going to be able to do it in such a way that everyone is going to think it is a fair system. So I do not envy those who do the job. Just looking forward, since that is what we are really looking at, there are two things that occur to me. One of them is the point that Patrick brought up that as staffing allowances grow, as they have done, and the encouragement that Members are given to move their offices and staff offsite, I think we probably do need to comment in our report about the IT facilities because they are a real issue and the facilities available offsite are pitiful. There is a real issue, having investigated this both for my own staff and for other colleagues who have spoken to me, about having people being located offsite, particularly if you are using IT facilities and casework management, which have all the data processing capabilities. So I think that is a serious point. If we are going to look at, particularly if staffing allowances grow over time, the fixing of some of these issues, particularly the staff, then the IT facilities and how easily people can work offsite are key, and they are as integral as providing more work accommodation. The second thing, which has come up, I think, in the number of the letters and reports that we have had from Members, goes to style of work, perhaps amongst newer Members. It struck me, and I was quite surprised, that amongst more longstanding Members it seems to have been a way

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of working that the Member would be located in an office and either their researcher or secretary would be some distance away and would maybe only talk to the Member once or twice, and certainly from my business background, talking to a number of colleagues, that seems to be reflected certainly from the new Members. That is not how people work in the modern business environment and, certainly for myself, having one's staff physically located either in a next door office or in your office is a popular move with a number of Members—not with everybody—but that is certainly a problem that a number of Members have identified, that their own office, they have said, would be perfectly adequate for themselves but trying to locate themselves and one or two staff is what has been problematic, and being given accommodation elsewhere in the building does not necessarily fulfil that need. That is obviously one of the huge advantages for certain Members in Portcullis House, where you have not just good accommodation for Members but much better accommodation for their staff, co-located. So that is something we would be very interested in the feedback that you have from Members, and whether you think that is an atypical comment you have had from Members or whether that is something you have picked up.

Mr Ainsworth: It is a problem with the system. We allocate the Member's office and then the House Authorities do their best to put Members' staff as near as they can. I do not know whether either of the other Accommodation Whips would like to take over the allocation of Members' staff offices because I would be absolutely appalled by the thought of it. As I have said, whether the House Authorities would seriously want to take over the allocation of Members' offices, I think they would be equally appalled by the prospect of that. It is a problem but it is about the nature of the building and the changing nature of Members of Parliament as well and changing attitudes.

Sir Robert Smith: It may be needed to look at how the building can evolve to try to get staff of Members or distribute them on site because there are actually, slightly strangely, Members rooms that are allocated by the Whips and then obviously some of those Members' rooms automatically allocate staff because they have an adjoining office and staff; but then there are one or two anomalies where the room is dedicated to staff even though it is not physically linked. So there is a little bit of flexibility in the Whips' Office on the margins to sort out some of the Members' staff accommodation. Then there was the informal sorting out that used to be done before I was Accommodation Whip, where old hands to new hands would say, "You have just been given staff desk so and so and if you swap that with so and so and give that to so and so they could then create a little complex near to where they are working," and the House Authorities went ballistic when they discovered that all the extensions were going to the wrong people, but that was how informally Members adapted this place to try to get their staff nearer. But maybe there does need to be more thought about how we can get staff and Members co-located or at least closely located.

Q24 Mr Harper: I do not know, not having been here for very long, how difficult juggling acts Accommodation Whips have. There certainly is a trade-off in terms of size and quality of accommodation and proximity and I do not know to what extent—and I do not know to what extent you want to comment on it—but it strikes me that there may be Members who are prepared to have a smaller office or a less grand office and have it here, and other Members, I know, have moved from here to Portcullis House, partly either for themselves or for their staff, and there is some flexibility. Given the nature of the Estate and the fact that it is not going to become uniform ever, probably, I do not know whether we use that trade-off as best we could or whether there is perhaps a better way we can do that, to suit individual Members. As you have said, Members are different and what may be a great office for one may just not be appropriate for another.

Mr McLoughlin: These things have all taken place over time. One of the factors that is true is when you have been here for a Parliament a number of people will start going up to their Accommodation Whips in the six months before an anticipated General Election and say, "By the way, come the great day when we take 300 seats off our opponents I would like so and so office," and you say, "Yes, I will bear it in mind," and you bear a lot of things in mind and then you wait for reality and then you try and accommodate those people that you accommodate. That sort of thing does go on and there is a lot of horse-trading which goes on between Members, which is fine. I know that one of the things the Committee has looked at in the past is this horrible sort of period where we kick Members out almost at 24 hours' notice and they are not allowed on the premises and not allowed to use phones and so on, but one of the problems that we have as a Parliament, different to the United States, for instance, is that we are basically meeting the next week. You have a General Election on the Thursday and Parliament reassembles the following Wednesday. On that Wednesday you get a number of new Members of Parliament coming up and saying, "When can I move into my office, where is it and can I have the phones switched on straight away?" Although I can understand the desire to be a bit more sympathetic to somebody who has lost their seat I am afraid there is also the desire on behalf of the new Members to say, "Can I have my office next week, please?" They have to be cleaned, sometimes they have to be smartened up and sometimes the offices get into a right state and a bit of work has to be done on them before they are able to be reoccupied. So I think that is part of the difficulty and in the United States you get eight or nine weeks before you take over your position.

Q25 Mr Harper: Just a very quick question. It was only really the comment that Bob made about expectations of use of office, whether there is an expectation or whether we ought to set an expectation in terms of what Members can expect,

not just in terms of size but facilities available in an office, storage, things like that, just so that it is balancing what Members can expect.

Mr McLoughlin: There are rules about that, there are rules about how many filing cabinets you are allowed, and all that kind of thing, but they are really a thing of the past now with computers and so on and so forth. And you do come down to this different point. Some Members have constituency offices very highly visible on the High Street. For some other Members, it would not be appropriate. So it is all about the way in which individual Members of Parliament tend to operate.

Chairman: Just for the record, I have an urban constituency and all my staff, apart from one, are in the constituency.

Q26 Frank Dobson: Can I say that I feel we have been devoting our time to talking about dividing up the cake without considering whether the cake is big enough, quite frankly?

Mr Ainsworth: The size of the cake.

Q27 Frank Dobson: Since I came here in 1979 I have had an office in New Palace Yard, Norman Shaw North, Norman Shaw South, Norman Shaw North again, the main building, 1 Parliament Street and Portcullis House, and until I got into Portcullis House I did not have an office which compared favourably in any way with the one that I had before I was an MP, about 200 yards from here, and I think by and large our accommodation is a disgrace for a very large number of people, and I think we should start at the beginning and ask what do we think is the minimum office requirement in this building for every MP and those who want to have their staff ensuited with them, which most do, I can assure Mark. When I was in New Palace Yard I never went to New Palace Yard, I worked in an office full of Tory researchers because it was across the corridor from where my secretary was. So I was working in her outer office in effect, and it worked like that. I do not think very many people want to be separated from the people who are working for them, they would like them nearby; that is how it is arranged in any sensible organisation, except that this is not a sensible organisation, as we all know. I really think we ought to start at the beginning and say, "What do we want? What can people reasonably expect?" and then set out to provide it, and I think the discussion is starting at the wrong end, quite frankly.

Mr Ainsworth: I totally agree with Frank; we ought to be looking for opportunities to decant people out of these buildings in order to provide adequate accommodation for Members of Parliament and I think that has to be part of your report.

Mr Jones: I agree with Frank but the other issue is around whoever gets the job of Allocating Officers, I would keep with the Whips. If you want a really good read over the summer read Robert Caro's book on *Master of the Senate: Johnson*, his allocation of offices. I am sure that these three will have perhaps read it. I think in terms of Frank's point what I find appalling, having been in local government, is not just the way that offices are

allocated or the type of accommodation that we put up with, but also getting anything done in this place.

******* I think the other thing we need to do is to look at this building and look, as Frank says, at what is in here and why are people here in the first place, because I think—and clearly the report says here—that there are 646 of us but there are 721 offices. That should really match up, but then you add into the layer, which has been described, about different sizes and different accommodations. But it would be interesting to see how many people who are in this building really need to be in this building, and also in accommodation far superior to the accommodation that certainly I have had in this building. In terms of the issue around windowless offices, I agree totally with that. The starting point is Frank's point, which is what we actually need to do, because you also have the situation whereby if you get into the arguments about who has what the House Authorities are going to divide and rule, which I think they have done for many years, very successfully, frankly, in this place, and the key thing they have done for many years is look after themselves very well but not us. Going back to basics, to use that word, the basic thing is that Parliament is here because we are here and I think that should be the starting point, and I know that is a radical statement in these terms. I was in a windowless office, as Bob knows, along the corridor there and they are absolutely dreadful. Just to correct Pete, there are some Conservative Members along there in those windowless offices, but Mr IDS, who has a very nice grandiose office along here also has all his staff on the other side of the corridor with offices with windows. So there are things like that that need to be sorted out as well. I think it is basic and I think this graph *here* sums it up for me just in one.

Q28 David Lepper: What I have not quite understood yet, despite all that you have said about the difficulties of the decision-making, is about Members sharing offices. I know some Members choose to share offices and they quite like to do that, but we have also had evidence from Members who obviously feel it quite difficult to share, however well they get on with other colleagues. Why is it? I have not quite understood why, when there is a surplus of rooms over numbers of Members, we have to have some Members who do not wish to share sharing.

Mr Ainsworth: We do not, as far as I am aware.

Q29 David Lepper: Yet some of the evidence suggests that it is happening.

Mr McLoughlin: I must admit that I am staggered that there are 741 Members' offices. I just do not recognise it, to be honest.

Mr Ainsworth: There is some accommodation, which is empty.

Q30 David Lepper: Members' accommodation?

Mr Ainsworth: Members' accommodation. If you think about it, if the puzzle was completely full you cannot move anybody. I have one or two offices—and Parliament has not been reshuffled since last autumn—that I have been thinking about allocating

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and I have been wondering whether or not is he going to do it, and I have not moved and I did not bother to move—it was just before Easter—because the pressure became too great and I had to accommodate one or two people who had some viable concerns. As far as sharing offices is concerned there is, as far as I am aware, on our side nobody sharing an office who is unhappy with sharing an office. I made a suggestion to a new Member that they share an office because I have a very large two-Member office half full and they were kicking up about the amount of . . . And this is a big problem. London Members in particular—and I know how much I pay for my constituency office is astronomical and it gives me a huge problem with my IEP—there are London Members now who are closing their constituency offices because they cannot afford to pay the rent. It is a major problem. If I have that problem in Coventry then I can imagine what people have in London. This was a London Member who wanted to base all of their staff here and because they were new Members I was not going to give them a great big grand office. I had a great big half a grand office but they did not like the idea of sharing. So there are those issues that come up. It would have been a lot more space for them but they would have had to have shared it with someone else. The issue has already been raised, that people are different, are they not? Some people are happy to share and some people are very unhappy to share, and this person was not happy to share. But I am not aware of anybody other than that being asked to share who is not happy.

Mr McLoughlin: I have nine people sharing offices; I have a four, a two and a three, off the top of my head.

Q31 Mr Donohoe: Page 11 of this report has two new Members.

Mr McLoughlin: I have nine Members altogether sharing: one in a four, one in a two and one in a three.

Sir Robert Smith: There is a history of how some of these offices have come about, that they were so big and open plan that it was difficult to see them as a one-person office.

Q32 David Lepper: One other question, if I may? Frank has raised the issue that if accommodation in this building—I have never been based in this building—it is not suitable then we need to think about decanting people. What do you anticipate would be the reaction of some of those Members who have been long established in these offices if that suggestion were made?

Mr Ainsworth: I am not talking about decanting Members from the building I am talking about decanting non-Members from the building. I do not see how a Member can work without a member of staff nearby. There are Members who happily do that, as has been said, but I need my staff nearby and yet I have Members in accommodation, whether they have a window or whether they have not, and their staff are way over in the Norman Shaws, or wherever, a tiny little room on Upper Committee Corridor North or Upper Committee Corridor

South. It is a scandal to me. If the offices are that small they should have two next door to each other so that they can have their staff in one and be in the other by themselves. There should be minimum standards that are fit for purpose and allow the Member of Parliament to do the job they were elected to do.

Mr McLoughlin: If I could just say on that, when we talk about changing Members here we are talking about when the rooms are being changed and not actually kicking people out, in the main, and I think that would be generally welcome as opposed to frowned upon.

Q33 Neil Gerrard: I would not welcome having your job. I remember talking to one of your colleagues a few years ago, after two weeks in the job, saying to me that it had made him realise that size actually did matter! What Frank has said I think is absolutely right and I think there is this other issue of making sure that the best use is being made of what accommodation there is. I just wonder how far you become aware of accommodation that has been allocated but is either not being used—and I have seen incidents of that, where there is an office that has been allocated either to a Member or their staff that sits there unused, in some cases for years—or is being grossly underused. We have this figure here of 70 rooms allocated to Ministers in the House and I suspect that some of those are never or very, very rarely used, and yet we have all this pressure on elsewhere, and when some of us had a walk round the building a week or two ago I remember a room we saw on the top floor that was being used for lobby briefings—a big room that is virtually never used and sits there unused 99% probably of every week on average over the years. How far would you be aware of accommodation that just was not being used? Not just for Members but maybe other accommodation as well that sits there unused or very little used.

Mr Ainsworth: I think it is an enormously difficult area to get into with Members. Let me first of all repeat what I said about Ministers. I think there is an exaggeration of the under-utilisation of Ministerial accommodation. I think there are Ministers in their cells at 8.30 at night when the people who think that they do not use their accommodation—

Q34 Neil Gerrard: There are some who obviously do.

Mr Ainsworth: . . . who are working there, and they are probably not working there during the day. When I was a Minister I had a very small office up on Star Chamber Court and my member of staff used it nine to five and I used it six to ten. We sat in the same chair because there was not room for another chair. Anybody who went to look at that would be unaware of the fact that effectively two people were working in there; so there is that side to Ministerial accommodation as well. But the hard area for us to get into is once you have allocated an office to somebody can you just chuck them out because they do not need it? I think you are right, it is a big issue. You wind up with a fairly senior Member with a fairly decent office who really does not need it but he

is not going to give it up, and yet you might have new Members who have staff crawling up the wall, interns coming out of their ears, who think, "Why can I not have that space there that they are not using?" How can we get to a situation where we as Accommodation Whips, or anybody else you give this power to, throws a senior Member out because they have decided that they do not deserve the accommodation that they were once allocated any more. It is almost impossible to go there.

Mr McLoughlin: This may sound strange but I would like to say on the Ministers' accommodation front that the government enjoys even now a relatively healthy majority. That does not mean to say that governments will always enjoy a healthy majority and there may be times where the government's majority is not as huge as it currently is, although they think it is fairly tight. They have a very comfortable majority and those such times you will have Ministers working in their offices whenever the House is sitting and not in their departments and that has to be borne in mind. You can get over complacent because the last three Parliaments have had very comfortable and healthy government majorities, but that will not always be the case.

Neil Gerrard: I think the other part of that is probably more a question for the Serjeant because there is also an issue with Members' and staff accommodation which does not get allocated and sits there unused.

Q35 John Thurso: On this question of size it seems to me that part of the problem is that the papers we have very much say that size equals quality, with which I would disagree. I think I am the senior Liberal Democrat mentioned in the papers, but the "senior" in front of it put me off! I have two rooms, one of which has the staff in and one in which I work, and that is a suitable arrangement if you do not have a constituency office and, given the 3400 square

miles of the constituency, I do not think anybody begrudges me that. But if you look at some of the other papers they talk about what the minimum is for City law firms most of whom, of course, are in brand spanking new modern buildings that have been built very recently and therefore are purpose built and so on. I would just ask you to comment that it is not actually about the number of square metres but the effective use of the square metres, and a small suite, which is not a lot of square metres, can actually be a very effective working space and a large room like this with one person in it can be very ineffective. So should we not be looking for more effective accommodation all across the piece?

Mr McLoughlin: I think I would say definitely yes to that. One of the things that is true is we have got to be slightly careful because we build ever more accommodation in this place and find ever more uses for it. Portcullis House gave us a huge variety of new select committee rooms and one of the things I rather hoped would happen, when we managed to do a bit of a survey, is that the select committee rooms up here, which hardly any select committee these days ever use because they prefer to be over in Portcullis House, could have been turned into some very, very smart Members' accommodation for some senior Members. I would have liked to have seen those cut in half, a bit like Committee Room 20 is now, Peter, and made into two offices for Members and staff. They would have been for very senior Members of Parliament. However, it seem we have a never exhausting use of committee rooms. We seem to have a lot of all-parliamentary groups at the moment ***. To me it is a regret that we have not managed to utilise some of those which would have been very good parliamentary offices available for Members.

Chairman: Thank you very much, gentlemen, for giving us your time. It has been an extremely useful session.

Witnesses: **Mr Peter Grant Peterkin**, Serjeant at Arms, **Mr Paul Monaghan**, Director of Estates, and **Mr Greg Unwin**, HOK International Ltd, gave evidence in private.

Q36 Chairman: I am sorry to have kept you waiting but I hope you found that useful. Welcome, Mr Unwin, to your first select committee.

Mr Unwin: Thank you very much indeed.

Q37 Chairman: We have got some written evidence but I do not know if anyone wants to make some opening comments before I open it up for questions.

Mr Grant Peterkin: Can I just begin by saying thank you for allowing us to sit in on the accommodation whips' evidence. It is, I hope, useful from your point of view because it will avoid duplication. I think it highlights for me that this is both a very difficult area where it is six of one and half a dozen of the other, and it is an area where the accommodation whips and the Serjeant's Department in particular have to work absolutely hand in glove, particularly at a time of general elections or other major changes of accommodation usage. If we look back over the

previous Services Committee inquiries into accommodation in the 1980s and 1990s, the first of which produced 1 Parliament Street and the second one Portcullis House, that overriding theme of trying to provide more accommodation for Members near the Chamber has been met, and all that we have done since the completion of Portcullis House is provide (mainly through the good offices of HOK) that up-to-date evidence in terms of those inquiries in 2002 and 2003 of what accommodation we had, going back to Mr Dobson's observation, and both benchmarking reviews, and probably what is going to become of real interest to you, the Occupancy Review done in late 2003 as to who needs to be here most, as well as (to answer Mr Donohoe's question) the evidence that we did in the run-up to the general election and updated in January of this year of exactly who has what in terms of office space. I accept Mr Thurso's point that, of course, you can only provide the objective evidence in square

metreage; you cannot provide that all-important subjective evidence of what is the quality that goes with those offices because, as you have indicated to the accommodation whips, again choices and priorities for Members are very, very different in terms of where they want to be and how they want to work in relation to their personal staff. For me, Chairman, I think that a really good outcome from this inquiry will give officers of the House some very clear guidance on the priorities of works that your changes will necessitate and will also give us in a dynamic world an updated set of priorities for both the furnishing standards and the space standards that are appropriate to the way in which Members work currently.

Chairman: Thank you very much for that. I have got Pete Wishart first.

Q38 Pete Wishart: It is probably a question for the Serjeant. I am trying desperately to understand the relationship you have with the whips in terms of the allocation of offices. Is it the case that the whips will decide who gets what type of accommodation based on the criteria we have heard from the whips, and you will try and find that accommodation, or are you involved at all in the discussion of which Members should get what type of accommodation?

Mr Grant Peterkin: We have regular meetings between the Serjeant and the accommodation whips. I am afraid I have only been here for one general election but in the immediate run-up to the general election we identified exactly what data the accommodation whips would want and need when we came to return, in this case, in May. We then sat down in my office and we went through the detailed data and we suggested to the accommodation whips what was a fair allocation of offices in their numerical allocation. Before then I did not umpire but we observed the horse-trading that went on between Mr Ainsworth and Patrick McLoughlin in particular.

Q39 Pete Wishart: My understanding is that you service and facilitate the whips in getting the accommodation to the Members. Would that be correct?

Mr Grant Peterkin: We provide the detailed data that they need.

Q40 Pete Wishart: Can I then ask about the role of Judy Scott Thomson in all of this ***.

Mr Grant Peterkin: She has no role at this stage. She is the engineer who puts into place the series of office moves that follow on when we get feedback from the Government accommodation whip, for example: "the following Members have been allocated the following rooms and therefore need to move."

Q41 Pete Wishart: Is this because we go to Judy when we have issues and problems in terms of the allocations?

Mr Grant Peterkin: Between periods of major moves she is the start point for trying to address routine accommodation issues. When they become less than

routine they gravitate to myself and to then dealing with the respective accommodation whip of the relevant party.

Q42 Pete Wishart: I am just trying to determine what the process is if Members of Parliament have an issue about accommodation. Judy would speak to the accommodation whips and possibly yourself in terms of trying to get what we consider to be a fair allocation in terms of rooms available?

Mr Grant Peterkin: I have to observe that a number of Members who are dissatisfied with the allocation of their offices or the fit of their offices do appeal to me, but I am afraid I have to say, apart from providing a good ear to them, "the allocation as it is currently arranged is done by the party accommodation whips".

Mr Unwin: It might be useful to clarify that allocation process, if I may. The 721 number that has been referred to, which is a total of 14,800 square metres, is controlled in this process that has just been described by the whips and allocated between the parties. Then Judy and the Serjeant's Department have an additional 5,800 square metres available to provide to Members' staff.

Q43 Mr Jones: How much was that?

Mr Unwin: 5,800 additional on top of the 14,800. That gets allocated just to Members' staff where there are no Members sharing an adjoining suite hence you have some situations which have been described, that sometimes the residual space will not be in close proximity to the Member. So there are two parallel allocation processes going on. That might clarify the situation.

Q44 Derek Conway: Just on this point, Chairman, so the Committee does not charge off down a rabbit hole. Until 1994 with Judy Scott Thomson, the allocation of secretarial accommodation was done by the whips, principally by the Government's accommodation whips, but the situation had ground to a halt because it did not work. Smokers did not want to be with non-smokers. You were allowed then to bring dogs on to the Estate so people did not want to work in offices with animals. It was thought at the time that the only way to resolve these fights among many members of staff, who had been here for centuries it seemed like, was to have someone of Mary Frampton's and then subsequently Judy Scott Thomson's seniority and understanding to deal with that. I suspect where it has probably gone wrong is that an element of favouritism has crept into the system, almost inevitably in a way because people inevitably have favourites. I think one of the things I would like to follow on from Peter's question to the Serjeant is on the Furnishing Standards booklet which has been provided, although dated 2003, which of course was never approved by the predecessor committee dealing with that, it came out of nowhere, and during the general election there was this fight over the removal of nine Members' sofas. That was a staff-based decision. It was never made by the whips' offices because the whips overturned that and it certainly was not made by the

Committee. I wonder from the Serjeant's point of view whether sometimes members of his Department might believe they have more right to be deciding what goes on here than even the Members, based on their longevity?

Mr Grant Peterkin: I think the sofa issue was an unfortunate one in the sense that we could have communicated that much better. If there are other examples of us not communicating better I am very ready to listen to how we might do it better. The issue here, Mr Conway, as you know better than I, is that there is a finite supply of whether it is articles of furnishing or whether it is nice offices. Inevitably it comes down to the Judgment of Solomon in the end.

Q45 Derek Conway: The sofas are nowhere in this document on furnishing standards, are they?

Mr Grant Peterkin: They were not in the 2003 one, no. There is a residual stock. The decision was made, against the backdrop of course that what drove it was that the furnishings budget is the part of the Estates budget that is endemically always under the greatest pressure because there is an endemic burgeoning demand for accoutrements in offices, of which sofas are particularly expensive.

Q46 Derek Conway: What I am trying to get at is who made the decision? Was it the Board or did the Speaker decide?

Mr Grant Peterkin: About sofas?

Q47 Derek Conway: Yes, sofas are just emblematic—or settees as they call them here—of the problem. When you say the decision was made; who actually makes the decision?

Mr Grant Peterkin: I cannot answer that question because I think it happened before I was here. Then from our research, Mr Conway, it was very difficult to discern who exactly had made it. We had a very small stock of sofas, 15 in all, all of which needed to be refurbished—either cleaned or repaired—and a decision was made by either someone in the Serjeant's Department or someone in the furnishings department that the demand was always going to exceed supply and we could not meet the demand for sofas for everyone and therefore it was better not to create politics of envy by issuing the remaining 15. That was, as you know, overturned and those have been issued on a first come first served basis.

Q48 Mr Jones: I have heard all this but, frankly, it just gets made up as it goes along. Mrs Scott Thomson does make things up. She tells Members that people can have certain things and other people they cannot. Her attitude, frankly—when I first arrived as a Member I locked horns very early on with her because she talks to you as though you are a second-class citizen. That is certainly true of Labour Members of Parliament and the way she talks to staff is even worse. If she is leaving I shall certainly contribute to her going away present! In terms of the standards, what I find about the entire building very strange coming from local government is why things here are so difficult on maintenance and the things that happen in here. Decisions get taken like the one

which has been referred to on sofas. I understand that there is a warehouse somewhere where all this stuff is kept and stored. It would be interesting to see what is actually in there. In the summer recess the amount of stuff that goes in skips out of this place is also quite interesting. Decisions are taken—and I have raised it and I shall raise it again—about furnishings. Ornamental ashtrays have disappeared overnight with nobody explaining why these very nice fittings of this building have been taken away. There needs to be a lot more transparency in this. Also you should consult with the people who are actually going to use them. I will give you one example not just on sofas but in terms of the way things are. I shall not mention his name but a good colleague of mine had moved from Norman Shaw to here in the last election and he was told he could not have a certain type of filing cabinet because he was not allowed to have them here because he was not in Norman Shaw. He wanted that type of filing cabinets, which were available, but he was just told he could not have them because they were not allowed in his office upstairs in here, which, frankly comes back to amateurism. One thing we need to discuss is whether we look at outsourcing of the accommodation like you have in some big office blocks. Just finally in terms of allocation of accommodation, it is always going to be difficult and I accept that, but there are empty offices all over place in here and likewise decisions are taken such as why you relocate people into here around your own office—and Mr Conway highlighted one in his letter to you, which I have to say you replied in a great *Yes, Minister* answer—

Mr Grant Peterkin: I am very happy to answer it in full.

Q49 Mr Jones: One of the starting points we have got to say as this Committee is who is in this building and what is being done because it is not run for us, that is for certain.

Mr Grant Peterkin: Chairman, which bits of that question would you like me to address?

Q50 Mr Jones: Whatever you want to.

Mr Grant Peterkin: *** Again, if you wish to outsource this when the Committee comes to decide, that is a decision for the Committee. I do not think I can really say anything to argue against that, although clearly there are some very considerable factors that need to be balanced up before you come to that clear-cut decision. All I can say is that if there have been issues that have been addressed that you think, Mr Jones, should have been addressed by members of this Committee, I would welcome the initiative that the Chairman has recently offered me to see him on a much more regular and routine basis than has been the case hitherto so that we can actually decide what are those issues of political interest that are ones that your Committee would like to look at which perhaps in the first year of your existence we have missed. If there have been many I can only apologise.

25 April 2006 Mr Peter Grant Peterkin, Mr Paul Monaghan and Mr Greg Unwin

Chairman: I think it is important, given the point that Derek and Kevan have just made, I was looking at the consultants' report in 2002, and I have got the final draft here and this is the phase one report but it is pointed out in the recommendations that there is minimal buy-in from staff and Members who are in the House of Commons and that consultation and communication was one of the key issues. I know that is before your time, but I do hope that that is something that as you develop the 25-year strategy will be a key part of it. I think you get the message very strongly from the discussion here. The report points out quite bluntly that this leads to resentment of decisions that are made without their input and discouragement when their needs are not met. I think that is a message that we want to reiterate. Brian?

Q51 Mr Donohoe: In any other walk of life you would be the chief executive of this building and the Estate in general terms. That is your role. I just wonder if as part of that you have the responsibility of looking almost on a monthly basis at the allocation and actually where people are placed. Do you take into account the fact that there is a changing role and whether or not these people need to be in the Palace itself or could be somewhere else in the Estate?

Mr Grant Peterkin: I think it is right to say that recently we have not really, knowing there was always going to be an accommodation inquiry done as one of the priorities for this Committee, looked to see whether there is a need for change of usage between one department and another. At the moment we have a very limited amount of decant accommodation available to the Director of Estates. The priority really has been moving staff so that, for example, 7 Millbank can be completely modernised so that we can optimise that part of the Parliamentary Estate and get more people into the area than was the case hitherto.

Q52 Mr Donohoe: The likes of the management structure in this place, with you at the head of that in terms of the administration side, has a number of senior officers (like the Director of Catering) that are in the Palace itself who in any other walk of life (looking at Compass or something like that) would not require to be where the kitchens are, but here that is the case. Is that something that we should look at in terms of part of how we loosen up the amount of accommodation there is in the Palace itself?

Mr Grant Peterkin: I have always been certain that must be one of the priority areas you would want to look at. In a sense we have looked at that once quite recently in terms of the HOK Occupancy Study which gave a priority list of all the users in the Parliamentary Estate.

Q53 Mr Donohoe: I am always very sceptical of consultants becoming involved in anything. I have got a lifetime of experience in it and I can tell you that I do not call them consultants, I take the first three letters of the name!

Mr Grant Peterkin: They have just provided the unarguable evidence on which we will have to make judgments.

Q54 Mr Donohoe: I have been involved in too many. They can shape what you say and what you want to say they will say. The fact is we have got problems in terms of the share of the cake, if we are taking it as a cake, and Members' allocation is all about that. While it could be useful if we were to have the three whips fight amongst themselves as to what their fair share was, at the end of that process what would be better to look at is whether or not we can increase, as Frank said earlier, the number of offices and the standard of offices that are there and allocated to the Members. Is that something you think should be your role as to the way forward so that we can get to a situation where we do have by far more accommodation closer to where the Members require it to be in the Palace itself?

Mr Grant Peterkin: I have always been certain that this was going to be absolutely central to this particular inquiry. I would make two observations. The first is, to use your words, when we did the carve-up with the accommodation whips in May last year, I think that the whips would agree that they were given sufficient accommodation for their Members. The issue now is this burgeoning number of Members' staff and how we optimise their accommodation in terms of the relationship that they now have with their Members. The *quid pro quo* of that in a dynamic environment is to look at which of the House officials need to be in the Palace of Westminster and whether the data provided in late 2003, by HOK Consultants I accept, is still valid or whether there are different priorities or changing priorities. I expect you to make some very clear recommendations in that area. Some of the allocation and changes within the House of which this oft-quoted Post Office accommodation is but one, is in a sense preparatory for the very real likelihood that accommodation very close to the Chamber will be given up.

Q55 Mr Donohoe: Can I finally, because it has been referred to earlier by Derek, talk about the furnishing standards. As a relatively new chief executive, looking at the prices that are quoted here, I could walk into one of the best furniture showrooms around my constituency and get better prices than this. I am presuming in that sense that you might be able to look more closely at how we get best value for money for the almost utilitarian furniture we have been offered to see how we improve upon that to get best value for money.

Mr Grant Peterkin: Mr Donohoe, I do not think I am trying to defend that furnishing standards draft document. As a recent arrival to the Palace of Westminster, I think lessons over furnishing costs lie in Portcullis House, where people now are surprised at the cost of some of the specific furniture and fittings provided for that building, some of which have not lasted as well as perhaps those who drew the building up imagined when we first occupied it. I think that is a lesson we will take away from phase

two of the occupation of Portcullis House. I think that draft document is an indicative one and I accept that we can do very much better; we must do very much better.

Q56 Mr Donohoe: In future when you are looking for furniture, will you put it out to tender? Is that the way it has been done in the past? I have purchased furniture in the past in great quantities and I have never paid anything like the figures that are contained within this document. I am presuming that the Serjeant at Arms will make damn sure that is not the case in future when we are purchasing things. It is almost bizarre we have got Members fighting over whether or not they should have settees. I have never heard of anything more ridiculous and you will see something of a much better quality and value than we are getting and the prices that we are being quoted.

Mr Grant Peterkin: I do not disagree with a word that you say.

Chairman: I think it is a bit unfair to ask the Serjeant about a document that was produced two years before he joined us.

Q57 Mr Donohoe: He can make sure it does not happen again.

Mr Grant Peterkin: I can reassure you on that.

Q58 Chairman: Mr Unwin, do you want a right of reply to some of the remarks that were made about consultants? If you feel you need to, you can.

Mr Unwin: I think my role generally has been not to provide any advice on decision making and who should be where but, wherever possible, to provide objective experience from other industries and to help with the process of assessing the data about the existing Estate. So our role has never been to make political decisions on your behalf.

Q59 Mr Gerrard: Mr Unwin, you said something in the report about using the space that we have got more efficiently. What sort of things do you think we ought to be looking at?

Mr Unwin: One exercise that we carried out, which appears in the annex of the phase two report of the 2002 Accommodation Review, was to take a fresh look or an objective look at what is the supply of the accommodation on the Estate regardless of its current utilisation and understanding what that means about your capacity. In that process we used and developed some suggested guidelines for what typical space standards you would apply for different types of staff, based on a Member having a requirement for having enough space to have either a meeting table or informal meeting setting within their immediate work space, for certain types of staff that have high equipment requirements to have a slightly more generous provision of immediate space and filing, and then less for more typical staff who have a smaller footprint. So we used these three standards and assessed the supply of space on the Estate. The observation that has already been made is that you do not have a homogeneous set of rooms available. There is a great deal of variety in size and

quality and configuration and to a great extent you are going to be stuck with that, as I think the observation has been made. When you try and take a fresh look you are working in often listed buildings which have a lot of structural walls and the possibility of just creating the optimum situation of a lot of suited accommodation next to the Chamber is not an easy option. Working within the constraints of the physical space, we applied those standards and typically would look at the rooms that you have available. On the whole, you have a very large number of small cellular rooms and some larger cellular rooms. It is not a very flexible space. Applying those guidelines, you have easily enough capacity on paper to accommodate the current demands and anticipated demands to the next Parliament within the Estate. I should clarify that this was a desk-top exercise rather than a space-planning exercise. There may be one or two variants, and we have built in a contingency, but they may not be achievable. 3,750 is the recommended occupancy whereas the current demand for desk space is about 2,800 up to 3,000. When looking at just Members and their staff accommodation, and doing a similar exercise, the capacity we were looking at really becomes a tradeoff between whether it is acceptable for some Members to share with their staff versus how many staff should Members on average locate on the Estate? By trading off between those two you can choose along the scale, but if every Member requires their own cellular office with a space of anything up to 20 square metres, there is capacity within the existing Members' accommodation for each Member to have 1.5 staff on average co-located with them. If you try to start to co-locate more like two staff per Member you need the scenario of a certain number of Members sharing space with their staff because you have quite large rooms which are better utilised if they are co-occupied. Effectively there is a series of variables and decisions to be made, as Mr Dobson suggested, about what is the minimum requirement for Members, can we meet it within our existing accommodation, and are we prepared to set a cap or a limit on how much space any one individual will be allocated. By having those controlling mechanisms in place it is quite easy to address topics like under-utilisation.

Q60 Mr Gerrard: You are talking about the Estate as a whole so that would include buildings like 7 Millbank, in which there are no Members at all at the moment. I have seen suggestions that that could accommodate considerably more people. How long have we got the lease for on that building, do we know?

Mr Monaghan: We have a 20-year lease on that building.

Q61 Mr Gerrard: As from now?

Mr Monaghan: As of now we have about a 20-year lease.

Q62 Mr Gerrard: So we have got about 20 years, but if we were to think in terms of moving people who are currently situated in this building to other parts

of the Estate, is there any significant spare capacity in other parts of the Estate at this moment, or would that imply having to do some work, say for instance the refurbishment of 7 Millbank?

Mr Grant Peterkin: I think it is right that there is no spare capacity. The House authorities have just taken out a lease on some decant accommodation. If there was one plea I would make to this Committee it would be that decant accommodation, which is going to be absolutely vital in terms of carrying out some very major works—the cast-iron roofs which this Committee has heard about already, the replacement of the M&E systems which are getting fragile and the potential for a Parliamentary Visitors' Centre are the three such works.

Q63 Mr Ainsworth: What are the M&E systems?

Mr Grant Peterkin: The air-conditioning and cooling systems for which there is no redundancy and they are not going to go on for ever.

Mr Monaghan: The main services in this building are very old.

Q64 Mr Ainsworth: I just wanted to understand the terminology used.

Mr Grant Peterkin: My plea would be, Chairman, that the decant accommodation is not seen as the creation of an opportunity to move officers of the House there and then create more opportunities for Members' accommodation. That would not achieve the strategic aim of decant accommodation. There is no doubt, however, that we can make better use of the accommodation. If any of you have time to look at the new arrangements in both DFA and the new PICT organisation, you will see open planning and small cellular use of space by teams has created the opportunity to put many more people into the same amount of space once that area has been refurbished. I have to suggest to you whether this is a working model for Members' staff of the same party working in common areas, because that would again optimise the space if you accept that we have only a finite amount of space.

Mr Gerrard: A final point there, the figures that you quote on this gap between numbers you think could be accommodated and the numbers actually here is quite significant, and yet we are being told as well that outside this building we are pretty well at capacity, which suggests that actually the under-occupation and under-use is in here. Is that right?

Mr Ainsworth: I think he means the Estate not the Palace.

Mr Gerrard: In the Palace but if the buildings outside the Palace are at capacity—

Derek Conway: Are they?

Q65 Mr Gerrard: Are they? That is the question.

Mr Grant Peterkin: I think we are being honest with you. There are areas of under-capacity that I have recognised. Mr Ainsworth has raised already some ministerial offices. There are other areas which your tour will take you to, and some of them are attractively near the Chamber where space seems to be under-utilised. There are areas where departments could be better congregated rather than

being split as they are at the moment. It is exactly that sort of guidance from this Committee that I am hoping to get.

Q66 Mr Gerrard: That lobby briefing room upstairs; how often is that used?

Mr Grant Peterkin: That is formally used once a month during term time, but again I am faced and the accommodation whips know it only too well, with what is the historical state here, who owns what. The times I need to come to this Committee are when we make a change of use between one department and Members or one department and another, but until somebody gives that direction the press gallery will continue to occupy that very inefficiently.

Mr Unwin: I think the second set of figures that I quoted about the gap between supply and demand suggest that on paper at least that there is sufficient accommodation to accommodate Members and their staff within existing Members' and their staff space. The problem is one which the whips quite rightly highlighted which is the changeover period at the time of an election. Even though you can do a desk-top exercise to show that it is possible to provide reasonable space per person across the Estate, without a longer period of decant and an appropriate process whereby you can actually reallocate that space in time, perhaps through a more transparent process as has been addressed, there is very little opportunity to effect that change without causing considerable disruption during a time when the House is in session.

Q67 John Thurso: I wanted to look on the back of that paper ACC8 and section six on the Estates Strategy. It seems to me that a lot of what we have been discussing comes back to there being a strategy which actually includes an understanding of what the objectives are. I am slightly concerned having listened to evidence that there are lots of statements that are popped out that may not necessarily reflect what it is that the average Member really wants. Just to pick up where you left off, Serjeant, with the question of common space and the suggestion that members of staff of the same party might like to work together. Other parties one is in opposition to but one may be in competition with one's own party and in the opposition one has friends! I think the model is that Members of Parliament and parties are not a big business where you have a hierarchy and you can look at it like a firm of law partners with big cheeses, little cheeses, and the people doing the work. The business is the individual MP and his or her team, and those are all little, discrete businesses with variable space demands. I think we need first of all to start from that as the objective point, that you are actually talking about 600-odd individual businesses, as it were, if you want to put it in those terms. The other things is I hear a number of people mentioning the need to be close to the Chamber. That is probably dating back to work that is some four or five years old. The interesting thing to me is I think the centre of gravity of Parliament has shifted and it is now in Portcullis House. I would not trade

my Norman Shaw South offices for anything anywhere on Millbank because the place I meet people is the coffee shop in Portcullis. I think that goes for almost everybody else. There is therefore a bit of a change there. It seems to me therefore, possibly coming back to the point about the strategic plan, that there is an awful lot of change and water gone under the bridge over the last few years and we really need to get back to the question that Mr Dobson first raised, which is the cake, before we start deciding how to split it. Having a strategy in a big company is fine. The chief executive says we will have it, sorts out a team to do it, consults, charges it through, and that is that. You have the unenviable task of having that responsibility but then having a lot of other people like us who say you have got it wrong or whatever. How do we take this forward and who are the decision-makers in the process? In other words, are the Members making decisions or are they really making recommendations and are other people making decisions?

Mr Grant Peterkin: John, is your question relating to the Estate strategy or to the decisions that come out of this Committee?

Q68 John Thurso: It is two-fold. It is saying it is good to have a strategy but the current strategy is based on data amassed some years ago. All the evidence I have listened to and the fact that Portcullis has now been going for a few years and other things makes me think that maybe there is a need for some reassessment. Ultimately as a member of this Committee I do not believe I have any power or ability to make decisions. I am merely reflecting, as my colleagues are, my own thoughts on the comments of other Members. Who actually in Mark McCormick's phrase from his book, "buys the balloons"? Who is the fellow who signs the docket that spends the money?

Mr Grant Peterkin: If I can start by explaining the sequence of what I think will happen. We are developing a strategy with a new Director of Estates and a newly-formed Estates Board with outside experts on it. This relates to both the House of Commons and the House of Lords because the budget is a shared one. We are about to develop for the first time a 25-year Estates strategy which will identify, I accept very largely from a funding purpose, those peaks and troughs, for example, when does 1 Parliament Street interior need refurbishing, when does the interior of Portcullis House need refurbishing, when does the exterior need refurbishing, so you can iron out those peaks and troughs against the constant cost of the cast-iron roofs which have been introduced to this Committee once and the other high ticket items that are going to occur over the next 25 years. The dilemma that I have is how do we feed in what I expect to be some quite expensive aspirations and recommendations from this Committee, in relation to the internal fit of the Palace of Westminster in particular but the Parliamentary Estate as a whole into that strategy and who sets those priorities? The Commission pays for all of this but I see it as a strategy that is agreed by the Estate Board and

which goes to the House of Commons and its Lords equivalent board of management, but that that board of management at the same time gets some very clear recommendations from this Committee, and the key members of this Committee of course have the entrée directly to the House of Commons Commission and the Lords equivalent because they buy the balloons.

Q69 John Thurso: That is what I was driving at. It seems to me the strategy is a strategy for managing a set of parameters and what we are challenging is the parameters.

Mr Grant Peterkin: I hope you are contributing to them, yes.

Q70 John Thurso: For example my own suggestion was that the ideal should be that every Member of Parliament had a small suite which contained a discrete space for themselves where they could meet two or three people and have a little room next door where two members of staff could work in comfort, which is effectively what most of the suites in Portcullis House are. In other words, that was the right that every Member of Parliament had. You cannot accommodate that within the Estate Strategy. That is back to who buys the balloons. That is the Commission.

Mr Monaghan: We can address that in the Estate Strategy if that is what you want. We could obviously change the Estate strategy to meet that requirement.

Q71 Mr Ainsworth: How?

Mr Monaghan: We would have to look at the Estate and make changes in order to accommodate that. If you wanted to have more staff as has been explained, we would have to move people around and there would be difficult decisions made, but things could be changed obviously to accommodate different requirements. It is about priorities at the end of the day. It is about who has to be where and it would mean probably acquiring more accommodation elsewhere.

Mr Grant Peterkin: This is a very possible outcome in the sense that the first inquiry led to 1 Parliament Street and the second inquiry led to Portcullis House. What is this going to lead to? If everybody follows your point that is it, but then I have got to fight initially for the resources to support it, and there would be both the resources for the internal fit, which would be considerable, and then there are the opportunity costs of what effect that has on the works programme over the next 25 years and the human relations impact of who moves off the Parliamentary Estate and does their work or support to all of you from elsewhere.

Q72 Pete Wishart: But that is such a far-off ambition from where we are just now when there are still Members in windowless office. If we follow John's model and want to see that aspiration, we are a long, long way from even starting to achieve that.

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Mr Grant Peterkin: I have to observe that I think the windowless offices have been quite overplayed. I know the predicament of your own party, Pete, but there is spare Members' accommodation and there is a situation today where if we said no Member should be in a windowless office, we could find an office that is designated on the HOK data as suitable for Members to put people in that. There are penalties for the Government accommodation whip, I accept that, but we are not in a dire situation and I think that this is perfectly achievable, there is an opportunity cost to it, if there is a clear consensus from this Committee.

Q73 John Thurso: That dialogue would be from this Committee presumably to the Commission and you get stuck with all of the battle over there.

Mr Monaghan: You set the parameters.

Mr Unwin: I would advise in thinking about those parameters, as you have rightly pointed out, that there is a lot of variability in demand in each of those different businesses and how each Member chooses to run their operations. Some of those variables are whether or not they co-locate their staff in the Estate or the constituency and whether they have a team working model or segregation between themselves and their staff, some of the use of technology may change and filing. There is a lot of variety in the demand. There is a lot of variety in the supply. So a first step might be to try to define perhaps two or three profiles rather than having a single solution that should be right for all Members and seeing how closely the space available matches that. So a model for a Member co-locating, et cetera.

Q74 John Thurso: What I was driving at is that effectively if you go and look at—and I have not been for many, many years—what is provided for a senator or congressmen in America or in Australia or wherever—they have all got a suite of offices. Interestingly, none of them move. When you lose that particular congressional district you go out and the new guy goes in that. That is it, it is simple and straightforward. They have got the luxury of being relatively modern in their construction. Maybe the answer is to hand this building over to the tourist industry and build a new Parliament somewhere, preferably higher up so it will not go underwater in 75 years.

Mr Grant Peterkin: All I can say in response is an early indication from this Committee of where some sort of consensus is becoming apparent would be very helpful for us to do that supporting work to give you some of those outline opportunity costs of that particular proposal.

Q75 Mr Ainsworth: Before we get sold something let us understand exactly what is being said here. It seems that it is being said by Mr Unwin, and to some degree supported by the Serjeant, that you can accommodate within the Members' allocation the kind of aspirations if only you do it fairly.

Mr Unwin: You can accommodate the numbers in terms of the number of Members and a certain number of Members' staff subject to a tradeoff on

the occupancy of larger rooms. So if rooms over a certain size become multiple occupancy with a Member with staff or staff sharing.

Q76 Mr Ainsworth: Exactly. The only way that can be done is if you ignore the complexities of the building. For instance, we have got some huge offices at the top of Portcullis House, four or five of them, you would have to put two Members in there. I have got a massive office over in Norman Shaw South which is the old Director's office and I would have to have two Members in there. Members would be forced to share. You are putting a mathematical model to us that says that within those maths you can do what John Thurso says he would like and have a small suite for each Member of Parliament but you are ignoring the complexities of the way Members of Parliament work and the amount and kind and shape of accommodation that you have got. It is maths, that is all it is, it is maths.

Mr Unwin: The first point is I am not saying that suited accommodation for all Members would be possible in the existing Estate. I do not think that is possible for architectural reasons. A lot of those rooms are not sub-divisible in the way that would be desirable.

Q77 Mr Ainsworth: That is the point, they are not sub-divisible.

Mr Unwin: Exactly so that is the first point. The second point I agree it has not been fully validated against the requirements of Members and it is a theoretical exercise so I am not trying to push it as the final solution.

Q78 Mr Ainsworth: Within those you are taking into account occupancy rates and therefore you are saying that Members only occupy their space for 38% of the time in your documentation. That is part of your mathematics?

Mr Unwin: No. Part of the mathematics in that particular equation is in the scenario whereby you can accommodate 1.5 staff per Member, that is on the assumption that all Members have their own singly occupied office. So on that basis you can accommodate every Member in a singly occupied office so long as the number of staff is below a certain point. To achieve that I think the one thing that was addressed is that those large rooms become multiple occupancy and it is the concept of these staff of different Members sharing a large space.

Q79 Mr Ainsworth: It means large rooms handed over to staff accommodation so that mixed Members of the same party can go into the same room?

Mr Unwin: And that is where the solution might be deemed unacceptable. There are some areas where staff are currently sharing such as lower secretaries.

Q80 Mr Ainsworth: Can I ask the Serjeant I do not believe your solution is in any way practicable. How many people, in your view, and you are a relatively new Serjeant and you must have been horrified when you first came in the door—how many people if we

had the accommodation—can we decant away from the Estate without affecting the efficiency of operations, non-members of staff? Is it significant? Is it insignificant? Are there people who work in the Palace at the moment who if we had the place to put them we can decant them away in order to provide sufficient accommodation for Members and their staff?

Mr Grant Peterkin: I think that it would be very difficult to achieve all Members accommodation.

Q81 Mr Ainsworth: That is not the question I am asking, Serjeant. I am asking are there significant numbers of people who work on the Estate who do not have to be and we could run the Estate efficiently if we could accommodate them elsewhere, if we had sufficient accommodation to put them?

Mr Grant Peterkin: I think the Board of Management view is that that is probably limited in the opportunities that it is going to provide us.

Q82 Mr Ainsworth: You are seriously suggesting that the overwhelming majority of people who work here have got to be here?

Mr Grant Peterkin: The formal data of course is in the occupancy report and yet we all see in other businesses—and I have rusticated a government agency from all over England to Glasgow—that there is huge opposition to doing it initially but when people do rusticate that it does work, but it is hardly going to be for me to deliver this. It is going to be much more, Mr Ainsworth, for people like you to deliver this.

Q83 Mr Ainsworth: I understand that. The other question is do you believe that it is appropriate that a middle-ranking officer of the House—I have not got the right terminology there—should have significantly better accommodation than a Member of Parliament?

Mr Grant Peterkin: I am not sure which example you are using. I do not think that there are many. I do not recognise from my tours of the Estate all these officials who are housed in grandiose offices, the Clerk and myself perhaps being an exception to that. I have an office of 19 square metres.

Q84 Derek Conway: Could I help, Chairman, because I think it is difficult for the Serjeant because in many ways he is the whipping boy for the system. I am not sure where the buck stops in all of this. Obviously it stops at the Commission, but, for example, and concerns two Labour members, if you look at the North Curtain Corridor, you have the Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party who is a Privy Councillor sharing an office with four people that is probably about fifth of the size of this room or less and you have got Denis MacShane, Privy Councillor, former minister at the Foreign Office in what is effectively an enlarged toilet with three members of staff in a railway carriage. On either side of those offices there are librarians working in offices the size of this, in one case with five work stations and five on the other side. Part of the frustration that you get from elected Members is that they see their

staff crammed in because the system regards Members' staff as almost foreigners or outsiders, they are not part of the system to be cared for and accommodated but somehow the system is always accommodated. That is why we had the exchange about the Post Office because it is a bit like the Army, if the sergeants' mess wants it to happen it is going to happen. That is just the way life is in this place. When it comes to people like the Clerk's Department and people like the Librarian's Department when they want to shuffle round the place does that come through you or is it the Clerk as chief executive of the board who is deciding these things? Where does the buck stop for Members who are not going through the whips' offices?

Mr Grant Peterkin: The allocation of who goes where falls between myself and the Director of Estates. I am normally aware of it. When changes happen internally within departments sometimes we find out about it, you know better than I, quite late. There is not a very clear reporting system of those changes, but you very rightfully put your finger on those parts of the Palace that are not optimised at the moment and the North Curtain is one area. Some of the offices that my Serjeants' staff use in the colonnade offices are again areas that could probably be optimised by being used by Members rather than officers of the House, but that is exactly what we must take forward together and get a new set of priorities within this dynamic environment which we are involved in. The whole Post Office issue that keeps on coming up is an attempt to free up accommodation in the longer term for Members and yet it has been misunderstood and seen as a land grab by the Serjeant. It is actually very different from that. It may well be that is very good accommodation for Members once it has been decided.

Q85 Derek Conway: It is thought to be the finance department.

Mr Grant Peterkin: You have actually got to give us some time to achieve the decant in order to free up the accommodation for officials to move out and create this head room. I think it is all eminently possible once we have got some clear direction.

Q86 Derek Conway: You see why there is suspicion?

Mr Grant Peterkin: Sure, I accept that.

Q87 Derek Conway: Why Members get suspicious because of changes that happen whilst our backs are turned?

Mr Grant Peterkin: Absolutely. What is mine is my own and what is yours is mine too.

Q88 John Thurso: Picking up on the point that Bob made there are many PLCs and big institutions in the private sector who had traditionally gloriously large offices who have become far more strict about who needs to be in London and certainly the company that I am Deputy Chairman of all of the finance function and all of the HR function all of the accounting function has been moved out to Crawley.

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I am trying to get them to move it to Wick but not with any great success yet! The point is would it be possible, looking at this as a positive challenge rather than a negative requiring a meaty answer, would it be possible to say to you can you start by listing who has to be here and everybody else by definition could be moved and if we then moved those with what we have left could we deliver what we are asking for? Could that be a positive exercise that could be done?

Mr Grant Peterkin: I think that is exactly the sort of evidence that the Clerk of the House wants to bring back to this Committee on the 9th once we have got some early indicators of what are those issues from today's investigation and subsequent talks amongst

Committee members are your early themes in this work, so that Roger Sands can respond to you. We can do some of that work once the Clerk to your Committee indicates what are the themes that you want us to respond to prior to that dialogue on 9 May. That would be very easy to do.

Chairman: Thank you very much gentlemen. Just for the record can I say that since I came in in 1987 there has been a huge improvement in the quality of accommodation provided by Members but it is quite clear from discussions we have had today that there is some way to go. I have found this an extremely useful and helpful discussion that we have had today. Thank you very much for your evidence and I am sure you we will see us again.

Tuesday 9 May 2006

Members present:

Mr Frank Doran, in the Chair

Mr Bob Ainsworth
Janet Anderson
Mr Brian H Donohoe
Mr Mark Harper

Helen Jones
Peter Luff
Mr Andrew Robathan
John Thurso

Witness: Mr Roger Sands, Clerk of the House and Chief Executive of the House of Commons Service, gave evidence in private.

Q89 Chairman: Hello, Mr Sands. Thank you very much for coming to our inquiry today. We have seen the submission which has been made by the Serjeant on behalf of yourself and the management board. I do not know if you would like to make any opening remarks before I open it up to the Members.

Mr Sands: Chairman, thank you very much. I am sorry if I kept you waiting, but there was a volley of points of order in the Chamber. I thought it might perhaps be helpful if I followed up some questions which I gather John Thurso directed to the Serjeant at Arms towards the end of the last evidence session: effectively what is the decision making process in this area? I think it is quite important to set the Committee's current inquiry in what I see as being the context. It is perhaps worth reminding some of the newer Members that the House Service was not, until 1992, responsible for the building or the provision of accommodation or its upkeep at all. The House was dependent then on a government budget. Your predecessor committees had to go cap in hand to a junior minister of the Department of the Environment or somebody like that to get expenditure incorporated into a government budget. I do not think that anyone would contest that things have improved quite remarkably since 1992 when this budget was moved to the House of Commons Commission, and that is where it now rests. Ultimate responsibility for expenditure on our accommodation, and therefore strategy in that area, does rest with the Commission. I think it is right to say that *this* accommodation review, which I know you have seen, does still underpin the Commission's official policy in this matter. One of the key findings was that the House of Commons must look beyond a reactive approach of simply acquiring more space to accommodate the increasing demand. The recommendations in this report, therefore, are centred on the following two objectives: achieving optimum use of existing space on the Estate and providing mechanisms for managing demand for office accommodation. This report came out, I think, almost to the month that I became Clerk. I can remember that it was discussed at the Commission, I think in March 2003, and the Commission did not demur from the broad thrust of the review. That was then reflected in the next Commission annual report: "The emphasis in the next period will be on consolidation and smaller-scale improvements rather than on major construction projects." It is still the case, in the

forward strategy which the Commission recently agreed for the period starting this year, that there is no provision for expenditure on an overall increase in the size of the Parliamentary Estate. Indeed, the one major works project that is flagged up as likely to arise during that period is a non-accommodation one, namely the Visitor Centre, which I know your Committee will be taking an interest in fairly soon. Seen in that context, the end product of your review, if you do not accept the thrust of that report that was submitted to the Commission in 2003, is to provide a strategy which will replace this one, based on comparable levels of analysis and statistics.

Chairman: Thank you very much.

Q90 Helen Jones: Before we even consider further building—and I do not think this Committee was considering that—has anyone ever looked at how accommodation in this House is used and how much under-use there is of accommodation in certain areas?

Mr Sands: That was exactly why this review was commissioned, because that had not been done on a systematic basis before that. It was precisely to establish the amount of use—and there are statistics here about the density and so on.

Q91 Helen Jones: When we started to go for a walk around this building, just to have a look at what was happening, we found a number of things that I think were rather disturbing. There were offices that were clearly under-used in the building. Downstairs, for example, there was a great big kitchen for the library staff. Why do we need a big kitchen, using up some of our floor space, when we have so many cafeterias in the building? There was a very big rest room for what seems to be a relatively small number of library staff here. Things like the old video room, which I agree could not be used as accommodation, but might be used for storage, which would free up accommodation elsewhere. Has anybody looked at these kinds of things? Why are we continuing with a system simply because it is the one we have always had rather than assessing exactly what the need for it is?

Mr Sands: One of the recommendations made in this report was that new and more scientific methods should be adopted for assessing need and new ways of utilising space. I cannot answer the question about that particular area—although I have chatted to the Librarian about North Curtain Corridor in

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more general terms. I know that in 7 Millbank, which is where the majority of our staff are based, they have been very active in pursuing new methods of space utilisation. Yesterday, I was visiting the new Parliamentary ICT service and their accommodation on the fourth floor at 7 Millbank. There they have introduced a very innovative style of open-plan accommodation based on, effectively, hot-desking: nobody has a desk of their own. It is a stark environment which I would find quite unwelcome but it does make maximum use of the space available. So we are trying to do that.

Q92 Helen Jones: How long have those rooms downstairs that we saw been in that use? Why has there been no proper assessment so far of whether they are needed? I am sure we could all point to examples elsewhere in the Estate. I give you that simply as an example.

Mr Sands: I am quite prepared to acknowledge that North Curtain Corridor is an area which may merit examination, but the staff there do have to be housed. We do not have large amounts of spare accommodation under the House Service's control. Since I became Chief Executive I have made it my business to visit all the main areas of the Service, and nowhere I have been have I felt that people really have large amounts of spare accommodation. The Librarian would, I think, be happy to enter into discussions about an exchange of use, as he feels his staff are spread about rather, but we are not in a position from our existing allocation to house all the staff that are presently in the North Curtain. So it would be a matter of exchanging accommodation for some which was existing in the Members' area.

Q93 Helen Jones: Who do you believe has priority for the accommodation in this building and elsewhere in the Estate? Where does the priority lie?

Mr Sands: In this building or elsewhere on the Estate?

Q94 Helen Jones: Throughout the Estate, but particularly here and in the nearby offices—as opposed to, say, 7 Millbank.

Mr Sands: There has been over the years a gradual process of moving the House Service staff out of the main building where they could be so moved. Over two-thirds of my Department is now located outside the Palace. The parts that remain are those parts like the Table Office, the frontline Table Clerks, the Public Bill Office and the Procedural Offices, which do, by their nature, have to be close to the Chamber. Hansard is the other area where there is a large number of staff in the department, as you will see from the figures, still located in the main building. I think the need for that is fairly apparent. It would certainly be difficult, for example, for the present arrangements we have for Members checking their own speeches and Hansard reporters sending down to get their speakers' notes and so on, if there were not that close proximity.

Q95 Helen Jones: I think we might come on to that after: if we had better IT systems that might be possible. How many staff currently have an entitlement to either residential accommodation near the Estate or overnight accommodation? What do we have in terms of residential accommodation?

Mr Sands: Directly on the Estate, the only people who have their own residencies are me, the Serjeant at Arms, the Speaker's Secretary and two office keepers. Those are all that are left. The current number of bedrooms—and no one has an entitlement; it depends on the job—has been greatly slimmed down. I can give you an exact figure, but I do not have it here.

Q96 Helen Jones: If you would send it to us, I think that would be helpful.

Mr Sands: Yes, certainly.

Q97 Helen Jones: How do we justify that, now that the House very seldom has all-night sittings?

Mr Sands: This is the bedrooms.

Q98 Helen Jones: The bedrooms, the residential accommodation. How do we justify that?

Mr Sands: I think there are separate justifications in the different cases. The Speaker's Secretary. It is an 18-hours a day job, irrespective of the House sitting, and I think if you were to approach the Speaker about this he would say he wanted his Secretary there. The Clerk of the House. All I can say is that the Clerk of the House has always had a residence of some sort. It has moved around. It has moved out of the main building. I cannot claim that the job could not be done without it, but I think that Speakers like to feel that the Clerk of the House is on hand for instant call if necessary. There is a particular point about the residences—which are the only ones that are now left—which are in the middle of the 1 Parliament Street development. My understanding is that, when that development was done in the late 1980s—it was the one big development that was done under the auspices of the Department of the Environment—it was done behind existing facades with a strong conservation element to it; and those houses, which are historic 18th century houses, had to be maintained for residential use. If you go in them, you will find that they are completely unsuited to office accommodation.

Q99 Mr Harper: If I may pick up on Helen's point about IT. To what extent is there a regular process where not so much the jobs that people do but the work that needs to be carried out is looked at to see whether, with the progress of technology, there are aspects of it that could either be done differently or done remotely (or perhaps was not possible to be done remotely), and therefore could be done by staff not located either in this building or on the Estate at all? How often does that process of reviewing roles and looking at whether work can be done differently take place?

Mr Sands: The process of reviewing how work is done to see whether it can be done differently with new technology is going on the whole time. As to

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whether it can be done remotely or not, this review in 2003 recommended that there should be an examination of the functions carried out in the House Service which could intrinsically be performed remotely. We have done that exercise. If it were decided that the Parliamentary Estate should expand and that it was too expensive for it to expand in Westminster, we know which functions we could intrinsically move. I have to say there are a lot of other considerations there because it is a fact that our staff terms and conditions of service have never hitherto included a stipulation that you have to be willing to relocate.

Q100 Mr Harper: Do they say that they will be here? Or do they just not mention it?

Mr Sands: They just have not mentioned it.

Q101 Mr Harper: So that is not a problem then.

Mr Sands: I think actually it is, because, if we move off site—and I think Crawley was mentioned at some stage in the last session—

Q102 Mr Harper: That is what normal businesses do all the time.

Mr Sands: Yes, indeed, but my understanding is that in HR terms we could not require any member of staff to relocate there unless they were willing to do so. If they were not, we would have to make them redundant, so redundancy costs would have to be factored in. I am not saying it is impossible; I am just saying, whether in Crawley or in Westminster, there is currently no provision in the Commission's forward plans for a further increase in the size of the Estate and a case for that has to be made.

Q103 Mr Harper: I do not think we are going to be making that case. Picking up the report that HOK did in 2004 that identified 516 house staff and contractors who would be able to carry out their work off-site, away from Westminster, most of those, I understand, are located in 7 Millbank and Derby Gate, and there is a small number in the Palace. If it was decided that they were going to be relocated away from Westminster and that therefore freed up space in Millbank and Derby Gate, has any work been done on looking at the staff currently located in the Palace and elsewhere in the Estate? How many could therefore move to 7 Millbank and Derby Gate to fill the space that would then be vacated, of those who needed to be on the Estate but did not necessarily need to be in the Palace. Has that work been done?

Mr Sands: No, that work has not been done in detail. All I can say is that I think the number would be relatively small, because relatively little of the accommodation in the Palace is now still occupied by House staff other than the areas that are directly linked to the Chamber and committees which I have mentioned.

Q104 Mr Harper: Forgive me if it was in the documentation we have already had, but, of the 276 staff of the House who have office accommodation in the Palace and the 357 non-office staff not based

in the Palace, do we have a breakdown of those job roles and the detail behind that anywhere? Forgive me if it was all in the report.

Mr Sands: You have got a breakdown by department.

Q105 Mr Harper: We do not have it down to the next level of detail, to job role.

Mr Sands: No.

Q106 Mr Harper: I do not need it by person, by names of people, but by role. It would be useful for the Committee to see. We obviously know for which services we value having physical face-to-face contact with people. For example, the Travel Office is physically here, and I know a lot of Members and their staff who are physically based here like to go and talk to a person, and we know of other facilities. We also have a fairly good idea about what does not need to be here. It would be helpful to get that breakdown by role. Part of a department might need to be here and part of it might not—and when I say “not here” I mean in the Palace—and it might be possible to move that. If you are going to shuffle off a lot of people in Millbank and Derby Gate to somewhere else, that would leave a lot of space. If all you did was to sell the space, that would not fix any of the other accommodation problems, so you would want to take people from the Palace and move them slightly further away but they would still be in Westminster. It would be helpful to know to what extent you could do that.

Mr Sands: Yes. Unless Hansard were able to restructure their operations in a way that enabled them to do remotely much more than they do now—and a very large proportion of their staff are already at 7 Millbank, but some are not—then I think the numbers would be relatively small. But we can certainly have a go at that.

Q107 Mr Harper: That would be very helpful if you could. If there is good justification for people being here, that is absolutely fine, but, for the purposes of our work it would be very helpful if we satisfied ourselves that we had looked at that in detail, satisfied ourselves that that was the case, and then that would be fine.

Mr Sands: I cannot say that we could justify all of them on the basis of an interface with Members. In some cases the justification would be a functional one. For example, I think it would be very odd, given that the majority of the catering operations are over here and the main kitchens are over here and the banqueting is largely conducted over here, if the majority of the supervisory management of the Refreshment Department were not also over here. I think it would significantly reduce the quality of the supervision and oversight.

Q108 Mr Harper: That is why it would be helpful to see the office space they use. I can perfectly well see that you would want the supervisory and managerial staff for those operations to be located in proximity to their staff, but that does not mean they all need to have an office. In fact, quite often you do not want

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people stuck in offices; you want them a bit more looking at the operations. There are also options with modern technology. I do not know to what extent, for example, there is an office in which people who work shifts could use hot-desking to share some of the facilities, rather than everyone having their own office, some of which are only used part of the time. There are ways in which you can have a much better use of space.

Mr Sands: Yes. As I say, we are looking at that in a number of contexts. I have mentioned PICT and there is greater use of off-site working in the Committee Office too. Whether that is applicable to the Refreshment Department which you mentioned, I rather doubt, because it is not so much the individual supervisors in the Refreshment Department. Let us take the Tea Room Supervisor: she is in the Tea Room, she does not have an office. I am talking about management at a somewhat higher level—the Executive Chef, the head of the department obviously, the Operations Manager—where there are records involved, personnel files and so forth, so I am not sure one can apply mobile hot-desking to that.

Q109 Mr Harper: No, but it would be useful for us to see that.

Mr Sands: Sure.

Q110 Mr Harper: If we could see the detail of those staff based here and the job roles, that would be very helpful. The final question is completely different. One of the things that struck me when we went around some Members' accommodation is that I do not think it has been very clearly communicated to Members, both existing and new Members, that the Estate is only big enough for them to have themselves and one member of staff physically located here. If they want to have lots of staff here, the trade-off is that they are going to be a bit squashed. Some Members expected to have themselves and one staff member. Some Members thought it was a realistic expectation to have five people working here, and clearly it is not. It struck me that part of what we aim to do is to have a clear explanation of how many members of staff the Palace can accommodate and therefore what Members need to have as their expectations of how many people they can have here. If they want to have more, they might be able to have more but they will have to accept that they are going to be a bit squashed. I just wondered to what extent that expectation has been communicated to Members. Certainly, speaking for myself, having only been here a year, I do not think it is very clear. A lot of Members think that, because they can have three passes, they are entitled to have space for three people's worth of space plus themselves, which of course is not the case.

Mr Sands: I think it would be very helpful if the report from this inquiry did say something about this. The current parameters are that the accommodation can cope with roughly one and a half full-time members of staff working for each Member—and that is an average, so there can be

more working for some Members, and there are some Members who have no staff here at all. But if there were some guideline which could be used as a parameter in future for designing the optimum accommodation, it would be extremely helpful. There are one or two other things which it would be helpful if the review could address. One which is a matter of continuing concern to me is the extent to which Parliament should be providing accommodation to support party political activity. This is an area which is not transparent. I do not know for certain what goes on and what does not. I think somebody raised the question last time that there was not enough accommodation for the Liberal Democrat people who are funded out of their Short Money. There has never been an explicit obligation on the House to provide accommodation for Short Money employees (if I may put it that way, for shorthand). I can remember, when I was quite a young clerk, that Tim Boswell, now an MP, who was a contemporary of mine at university, was the Conservative Party's expert on agriculture. He worked in Central Office, he did not work here.

Q111 Mr Harper: I think there is a distinction, though, because, for example, just speaking about the Conservative Party, the Conservative Research Department, being party political, is based at Conservative HQ and funded by the political party. The Parliamentary Resources Unit in East Cloister carries out parliamentary work and has some quite clear terms of reference—as I believe does the equivalent Labour operation—it does not enable them to be part of a political agency. That is what Short Money is for, is it not?

Mr Sands: Yes.

Q112 Chairman: I am anxious not to get sidetracked on this because we will run out of time.

Mr Sands: It is an important policy issue, if we are laying down new policy on what the House should be accommodating and what it should not. One thing to which attention is drawn in the papers is the very large increase in the size of the Leader of the Opposition's accommodation. I think it dates from about 2002. There is virtually a whole floor of Norman Shaw South which is effectively occupied by the Leader of the Opposition and his staff. All I can say is that it was suspiciously busy during the last election.

Q113 Mr Donohoe: Can I take you back to your initial statement, Mr Sands, which was in connection with the idea that up until 1992 a junior minister was responsible for giving funds for Members' accommodation. Was that the case?

Mr Sands: It was the case that it was a Department of the Environment budget. The operational responsibility tended to rest there.

Q114 Mr Donohoe: What was that budget? Did it include staff offices?

Mr Sands: No distinction was made.

Q115 Mr Donohoe: So the budget for the whole Palace and the administration of the Palace itself was coming from the Department.

Mr Sands: Exactly. The Property Services Agency maintained the Palace and such outbuildings as we then had, and any money that we needed to increase the Estate had to come out of that. For example, I mentioned the 1 Parliament Street development, which was really quite a significant breakthrough for us. That was fixed in a meeting which I attended between the then Leader of the House and the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Q116 Mr Donohoe: Is it the case today that the Commission makes a bid through the Treasury?

Mr Sands: No, it is not. The Commission can set its own budget.

Q117 Mr Donohoe: Where does the money come from?

Mr Sands: Of course it is public money just like any other money.

Mr Harper: We vote it.

Q118 Mr Ainsworth: The Treasury has to pay.

Mr Sands: When the responsibility for this big capital budget was passed from the Government to the Commission in 1992, there was a sort of understanding that major capital projects would be submitted for the approval of the Treasury. But all I can say is that, so far, there has never been any problem over that. The Commission approves an estimate and it is accepted, and the presence of the Leader of the House on the Commission obviously helps that process.

Q119 John Thurso: I referred, in Mark McCormick's book, to "who buys the balloons" in addressing the Serjeant, in trying to work out who was responsible. I would like to pursue that, if I may. In the evidence we discussed with him, it became clear that the ideal would be for each Member of Parliament to have a discrete office space that accommodated them and their staff, and there is a variety of models, from one larger room with all of them in, to two smaller rooms adjoining, such as there is in Portcullis House. I was asking who makes the decision that that would be part of the strategy and I was surprised by the answers we had from Mr Monaghan, who said that, in the Estate strategy, if that was what was decided, it could be accommodated. Therefore, it seems to me very important that we know whether it is possible—because as a Committee we would wish to make a realistic recommendation—if we establish that is a priority, firstly, whether it can be delivered, and, secondly, who is actually going to take that decision. Is it my understanding that it is the Commission who will ultimately be the decision maker?

Mr Sands: Yes. Obviously the Commission's role is definitive if we are talking about extra money. There is no question about that. If we are talking about a new policy in relation to how the accommodation is allocated and carved up, then, yes, I think it would

be the Commission ultimately, but I think they would take very careful note of a recommendation coming from a committee of this sort. I think there is an exercise to be done, in theory at any rate, in relation to Members' accommodation which is similar to the one we have tried to do in relation to a large amount of staff accommodation, particularly at 7 Millbank. That is to say, looking at the accommodation afresh and seeing how could we get best use out of that. I know Mr Ainsworth said last time, "This is just maths," but if we are going to try to approach this in a different way and try to squeeze as much benefit as we can out of what we have got—and there may be limits to that exercise but I think we need to have a go at it—then we do need to apply a little maths to this. The other thing we need to do, if I may say so—and *this* exercise was extremely helpful for us because it helped us to identify what was going on in the Estate and where it was going on—is to keep that information up-to-date. There needs to be a degree of regular transparency about who is occupying which offices within the Members' and staff block and why, and that information needs to be updated. I believe it quite quickly gets out of date. That is not to say that I am suggesting there is any realistic alternative to final decisions on allocation being taken by the Whips. I think they have to be. I cannot envisage that any official could do that. But I do think that we need to have a better database about what is happening in Members' accommodation if we are to be regarded as really responsible for running the Estate.

Q120 John Thurso: The Estate strategy takes as a given that the current Parliamentary Estate will not be enlarged. If we start with that as the first given start point, the answer I got from the consultant indicated to me that, with that given, if it was our wish that each Member should have the discreet space that we describe as desirable that could be delivered. In other words, without building any more, what we were after could be delivered—which I think took some of us by surprise because the assumption had been that it could not be. If our recommendation was that, within the constraints of no further building, that is what we would like to see, the Commission would then look at that and would presumably be content to authorise the experts and the Estate Board to come up with a strategy that delivered those objectives.

Mr Sands: I cannot speak for them, but they are in a position to agree to that. It would be a big step because it would cause a lot of turbulence. One of the problems—and I am very sympathetic to the problems which the Accommodation Whips face—is that Members get attached to their own accommodation. They do not want to be moved around: they get set in their habits and they do not want to be disturbed. I can entirely understand that. Deciding that we were going to launch an exercise like this which would involve inevitably a degree of disturbance would be quite a big decision to make. But if we were not to explore those options and were to go immediately for saying, "There is an unmet

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demand, therefore we have to hire another office block or something down the road”, I think that would be difficult to justify publicly.

Q121 John Thurso: It may be that I have misunderstood. I think what you are talking about there is how the cake of offices for Members is sliced up between the parties, which is one thing. What I am talking about is the size of the cake that is available for the Members to be parcelled out. Nobody could hold the Commission or yourself in any way responsible for how the Accommodation Whips want to do their slicing. That may well involve difficult discussions.

Mr Sands: A basic thing which has to be settled is the point that Mr Harper was making to me: how many Members’ staff should the House Service aim to accommodate in future? I know that the SSRB caused a lot of unhappiness with what they said last time round about incentives for Members to locate staff in their constituencies. We had exchanges about that when I first appeared before this Committee and I tried to explain how that had all happened. But it is an issue that will not go away. In addition to the permanent Members’ staff who are paid through the Department of Finance and Administration—and we know who they are and we can track them and their numbers—we know that there are constant incomings and outgoings, from interns, from people on work experience, from volunteers. How many of those should we expect or be expected to cater for at any one time? That is probably why you went round and found that there were people with five members of staff.

Q122 John Thurso: I watched the DVD last weekend of Jim Hacker when he has the hospital that he discovers is fully staffed with administrators, gardeners and everybody else but it has no patients or doctors. There is a sort of circular argument that goes on about keeping the thing open. We are the patients here, as it were. It seems to me that it is a wonderful red herring to start arguing about how many staff a Member should have. If you look at Portcullis House, there are a number of those suites which are discrete, where there are two basic rooms in a suite—quite small—one where the Member can work and one where staff can work. There are none that cannot take two comfortably. As Mark was saying, if you want to stuff four people in there, that is your problem, but I think it would be very easy to say, “That’s what it is. That is the square metreage. It comfortably fits a Member and two staff or a Member and one staff or whatever. If you want to go jamming people in and you can do it in your budget, that is your problem.” But my focus is on how we get to the ability to deliver that ideal of that kind of accommodation to Members. My understanding from what the consultant of the Estates Board was saying was that it could be done. If we recommend that, then I suppose I am really asking: Is that a realistic recommendation and would it be done?

Mr Sands: We would do our best to do it if you recommended it. I was quite surprised by what Mr Monaghan said.

Q123 John Thurso: Not half as surprised as I was when he said it.

Mr Sands: I could understand a bit of Mr Ainsworth’s reaction to it. Let us face it, Portcullis House is not typical. It was the first occasion we had a real opportunity to build a purpose-built building for Members.

Chairman: I think I should stop you there. We have got you on the record! I am conscious of the time.

Q124 Mr Ainsworth: This is most difficult. You really cannot get away from the notion that this is an enormously difficult job that the Whips will continue to have to do. But is it not awful when politicians, allocated space, wind up accommodating political activity. One will follow as night follows day. That is the reality of it. It is the most difficult area, I make no bones about it, but, unless the Committee approach it in a fairly systematic way, we are going to get nowhere, we are going to produce a report that is not worth anything at all. There are two issues. One, first of all, is the size of the cake. The second issue, just as important, is how that cake is managed.

Mr Sands: Yes.

Q125 Mr Ainsworth: One Member plus one member of staff is all the standard is. Despite the fact that it has grown—it has grown in a messy way—that is all the standard is that a Member of Parliament is allowed. Do you believe that in the modern age that is sufficient and we can genuinely hold our Members to that?

Mr Sands: No, I do not think you probably could. We know that there are, on average, about two members of staff per Member who are regularly here on the Estate.

Q126 Mr Ainsworth: Are you genuinely saying to us—there is the Clerk’s Department, the Serjeant’s Department, all the other people—that there are few people who can be decanted from the buildings in order to create more space if further accommodation was available?

Mr Sands: I have promised to do the exercise for Mr Harper and we will do that.

Q127 Mr Ainsworth: What is your ball park feel? Do you feel that there are not numbers of people who could be decanted if we had the space?

Mr Sands: I think it would depend how far they were being decanted to. The people who are occupying space in the Palace—and there hardly are any in the other parts in which you are now interested—in general, are not occupied with the functions that were identified in that exercise as being the ones we could move out. In general, the staff who are involved in those functions are already in 7 Millbank. The question therefore would be raised: Could we split up functions which are now more or less together and move some of them out of 7 Millbank? For example, I noticed there were something like 66 Serjeant at Arms staff who are in the Palace now. My guess is that those are people involved in daily maintenance and office keeping and that sort of function, and they probably could

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not be moved out, even if accommodation were freed up. But we can do that exercise. What I am just suggesting to you is that the amount of accommodation made available as a result of that is not likely to be sufficient to solve the sort of problems that I know you have. You raised the question of political activity. Of course any Member of Parliament is engaged in political as well as parliamentary activity. I was trying to focus on party political activity. Two examples flag it up. My understanding is that the Chairman of the Labour Party recently asked for six extra offices. What is that for? I know for a fact that the Conservative Party recently came to the Serjeant and asked to locate, on the Estate, members of staff who are engaged in the current policy reviews that the Conservative Party is undertaking. The argument for that was that they were being funded from the Electoral Commission's budget. I have reservations about accepting that that is part of the House's function.

Q128 Mr Ainsworth: There are surely only two ways of dealing with it. One is that we lay down a complicated set of rules and then we seek to police them. I do not know whether that is what you would see as a way of going forward. The other is that you

have a clear and fair allocation, not just an historic adjustment at the time of election, and then, having given it to the parties to distribute, you leave it largely within the parties to distribute. Which way would you favour? Do you seriously think we can have the kind of rules that would be imposed that would examine what the Leader's Office of the Opposition is up to on that floor in Millbank or what the Chairman of the Labour Party is up to in those offices?—and they were not six that they were given, but they have more than one.

Mr Sands: I think it would be quite possible to have quite straightforward standards about this. If staff are funded from Short Money—and currently I cannot identify which staff are funded from Short Money, because nobody tells me who they are: there is no obligation on the party to provide that sort of information—or from the Member's staffing allowance, both of which are parliamentary funds, then perhaps we have an obligation to accommodate them. If they are not, we have no obligation.

Q129 Chairman: I think it is probably best that we stop there because we have run over quite a bit. Thank you, Mr Sands, for your evidence. That has been extremely helpful.

Mr Sands: Thank you.

Witnesses: **Dr Chris Pond**, President, and **Ms Anne Foster**, Administrator, House of Commons Trade Union Side, gave evidence in private.

Q130 Chairman: We are sorry to have kept you waiting for so long, but the last evidence went on a little bit longer than scheduled for. We seem to have a rather depleted committee because there is so much else going on in the House, so apologies for that. I do not know if you want to make any opening remarks. We have received your written evidence but is there anything you want to amplify?

Mr Pond: I do not think so, thank you, Chairman. We thought we would submit a short memo to you, rather than answering in detail the points that you put out in your call for evidence which we thought were very much aligned towards Member colleagues. If there is anything you want to ask us, we would be very glad to answer.

Q131 Mr Robathan: Since you represent the interests of the House staff, how many members of the House staff are in fact in unions?

Mr Pond: We are not absolutely certain but we think it is something like 60%.

Q132 Mr Robathan: As you know, we are dealing with accommodation. How many rooms does the Trade Union Side occupy?

Mr Pond: We have one office for the Trade Union Side administrator in 2 The Abbey Gardens, where we were sent by the Serjeant at Arms during the accommodation reshuffle about four or five years ago.

Q133 Mr Robathan: Where were you before?

Mr Pond: In Norman Shaw South. Norman Shaw South was being converted for Members' use. In addition there is a meeting room which is used largely but not exclusively for Trade Union Side meetings.

Q134 Mr Robathan: It is a pretty big meeting room, actually.

Mr Pond: The Trade Union side is something like 16 or 17 and they do fit in there, yes.

Q135 Mr Robathan: I happen to know the room quite well. Funnily enough, I used to occupy the offices the Trade Union Side now occupy. I would not say I have an axe to grind! Why couldn't the Trade Union Side, like everybody else, when they have a meeting, book a meeting room?

Mr Pond: We could. That is what we used to do. The problem with that, of course, is that sometimes the meeting rooms are not available. There was at one time a very great shortage of meeting rooms. But it would be perfectly possible to do that. The meeting room is also an office for those union officials who do not have an office of their own, of which there are a number, so it is not just a meeting room. There is a work station, telephone and lots of filing cabinets in there.

Q136 Mr Robathan: As a matter of interest, do you think it is appropriate for the taxpayer in the form of the House of Commons Commission to provide accommodation for union officials?

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Mr Pond: Yes, sir.

Q137 Mr Robathan: We have just been discussing political parties' expenses.

Mr Pond: Yes, sir, we do, because it is generally done in the public service and there are formal facilities agreements in most government departments.

Mr Robathan: I will leave it there, thank you, Chairman.

Q138 Helen Jones: Can you comment on the problems that staff find working in this building. Are there any particular issues that you would like addressed relating to particular staff?

Ms Foster: I know of one person who has recently been told that in their two person office they are now going to have to have another desk put in to accommodate three people.

Q139 Helen Jones: Members are quite familiar with that.

Mr Pond: It is the 'quart in the pint pot' syndrome, is it not?

Ms Foster: That is going to give the over-cramped accommodation.

Q140 Mr Ainsworth: This is House staff, is it?

Ms Foster: This is House staff.

Q141 Helen Jones: We have tried to discuss which members of staff need to be in this building and which do not. Do you have any views on members of staff who do not need to work here or do not need to work in the buildings very close by (Norman Shaw or Parliament Street and so on). I will be blunt: Members feel very strongly that there is not enough suitable accommodation for Members. The place would not exist without Members. While I am anxious to see staff have proper, decent working conditions, the question really is how we can best shuffle this accommodation around. Do you have any views on that, please?

Mr Pond: We touch on that in our memo. We do not think the House of Commons management have thought laterally enough about where services might be provided. There are examples of services whose efficiency has been limited by poor accommodation. Although I would not like to make too much of an example of this, I think the House of Lords Record Office, which is a shared service between both Houses, is one of those. Members used to leave their political papers to be preserved in the House of Lords Record Office. The House of Lords Record Office cannot now preserve them because of space constraints. The staff are very much crammed in. The Public Record Office a few years ago was moved out from Chancery Lane, where it used to be, near the Law Courts, to Kew in Surrey and it is a great success story. The Essex Record Office used to be in County Hall at Chelmsford. That has been moved out to a purpose-built building, still in Chelmsford but near enough to be near the county administration, and much more accessible to the public without all the security constraints of getting them into the building. We think that management

ought perhaps to be a bit more proactive in considering the location of these services and making proposals, which obviously we would look at as staff representatives, for providing service elsewhere.

Q142 Helen Jones: Do you have any specific suggestions for services which might be relocated?

Ms Foster: Possibly the PICT help desk. PICT have done a lot in their refurbishment of hot-desking because they do not have enough space for the amount of staff they have. The people who work on the help desk itself are purely on the phone. They have field engineers who come out and see—

Q143 Helen Jones: So they could be anywhere.

Ms Foster: Yes.

Mr Pond: Some years ago I was Head of the House of Commons Public Information Office and there was then a half suggestion that the Public Information Office, which was basically a telephone bureau, might be provided elsewhere in London simply to ease pressure in the Estate. In the event it was decided to convert the top floor of the Norman Shaw North building for the Information Office and the Education Service. I think we simply feel that management have not been proactive enough in considering this possibility.

Mr Harper: So do we.

Helen Jones: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Q144 Mr Harper: Very specifically, following that, one of the questions I asked the Chief Executive was on the report that was conducted identifying the number of staff from the House who might be able to work off site away from Westminster, which would obviously free up space at Millbank and Derby Gate. My question was, of the staff who were then based in the Palace, how many and which roles could therefore be located on the Estate but in those other buildings that were a bit further away thus freeing up space in the Palace? That work has not been done and yet your note was very helpful because clearly for staff who are not based here the trade-off is that it is possible to provide them with better accommodation at a more sensible cost elsewhere, and obviously there would be appropriate negotiations over terms and conditions. I just wondered what your views were specifically on people in the Palace and whether they need to be here.

Mr Pond: Perhaps a parallel to that, Mr Harper, is the House of Commons Library which until 1991 was virtually entirely based within the Palace of Westminster. In the late eighties the Library took the decision that it would be possible to provide virtually all the backroom services in a building on the parliamentary estate and old Number 47 Parliament Street was converted for that purpose. It is now Number 1 Derby Gate, so there probably are other services like that but I think management would probably be in a better position to make the suggestion than we would. If management do make the suggestion we would be very happy to look at it.

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There may be constraining factors but, as I said, I do not think management have devoted enough attention to that sort of thing.

Mr Harper: I think we would agree.

Chairman: Thank you very much. That has been extremely helpful. Apologies again for keeping you waiting so long.

Witnesses: **Mr Greg Hurst**, Hon Secretary, Press Gallery, **Mr Michael White**, *The Guardian*, and **Mr Nick Assinder**, Hon Secretary, Press Lobby, gave evidence in private.

Q145 Chairman: Welcome, gentlemen. First of all, please accept my apologies that we are such a depleted committee but life is really hectic in this place on a Tuesday, as you know, and a number of people are away on other committees. We have your written evidence and I do not know, Greg, whether you have any points you want to amplify.

Mr Hurst: Not at this stage, Chairman, thank you.

Q146 Chairman: One thing I would like to ask just to kick off is that I think all of the plans for the refurbishment of all the premises are now agreed; is that right?

Mr Hurst: Yes, they are. These have been in negotiation for three years and between the Press Gallery and the House and I am pleased to say we have an agreement on the plans. We have had two public meetings of all the members of the Press Gallery at which officials from the House presented the plans. The architects and people from the departments involved have gone through the plans and members of the Gallery are supportive of the process and accept the need to refurbish this area and bring it up to modern standards. After negotiation we are satisfied that it will not adversely affect our ability to report Parliament.

Q147 Chairman: It is helpful and useful that we have made some progress on that after some of our discussions earlier in the year. One of the issues that the committee has been examining is who should be in the main building and who should not. One of the questions we have to ask you, because we are asking everyone else, is what are the reasons why the Press Gallery needs to be so close to the Chamber and occupy such a significant amount of space?

Mr Hurst: I will give you my own perspective and then I will perhaps ask Mike White, my colleague who has been here far longer than I have, to give a broader view. The location we have is right behind the Reporters' Gallery and our prime function is to be in the gallery to report the proceedings of Parliament. Clearly, we are very near to the Committee Corridor for committee meetings and near to the Members' Lobby. There are some jobs in journalism that can be done remotely or from different locations. I am sure that parliamentary reporting can never be one of them. We operate—and I am speaking from a newspaper point of view now; some of my colleagues are broadcasters and in Nick's case he is an internet journalist—on very tight deadlines. When there are debates under way, or particularly votes late at night, we have very tight deadlines and in order to report to our readers the proceedings of Parliament, important votes and that

sort of thing there is a very tight turnaround and so the ability to be in the Reporters' Gallery or down in the Members' Lobby talking to Members about how a vote has gone is central to our work at critical moments and I think it crucial that we are in the location we are in.

Mr White: In the note which the Hon Sec has provided for me—and considering he is a journalist, Chairman, he is a very good bureaucrat—he has talked about us being part of the parliamentary mix and I think that is a good phrase. The way Parliament does its business has changed over the years and the way we do ours has changed over the years. The fact that Nick Assinder, who used to work for one of the newspapers, now works full time for the BBC website would have been unimaginable five or 10 years ago. Nonetheless, the proposition that we are in the building and close to the action seems to me to hold good. I cannot say that all my colleagues share my prejudice that if you are interested in a debate you ought to be in the chamber because the television does not give you enough. A Member said to me the other day, “You were late for Prime Ministers' Question Time”, and I said, “I am very sorry. I was tied up but I was watching it on the television”, which, of course, is what we all do from our different perspectives. TV had to come in but it has had unintended consequences in terms of presence in both the gallery and the chamber. We can do other things while watching it, but my firm belief is that to know what is going on you want to be there and when I leave this session I will stick my head into the debate on the Health Service for half an hour because I am interested in it and I want to know who is there and what the mood is like because the Health Secretary has had her problems in the last few weeks and you cannot do that watching the television. Although a good deal has changed, and we do all turn the TV on, put the tape recorder on and things like that, it has changed for both the press and for Members and all our lives are made busier by new technologies, many of which are intrusive. I have remembered to switch my phone off on this occasion but I might not have done, and there are emails and faxes and all the things we are so used to, and we get chained to our desks more; there is no denying that, but I suspect that is true of you and your staffs as well. Notwithstanding changing times we value our presence in the building. We love our scruffy, overcrowded offices, which are going to be made less scruffy and less overcrowded under the modernisation plans, and we think, despite all the differences which arise between us from time to time, as they always have, that we are an important part of the process.

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Q148 Chairman: Thanks very much for that. We are under extreme pressure of space, not just in this building but in the whole estate, and as part of our inquiry we have been walking around looking at what accommodation is available. It is hard not to notice the Tower briefing room which, certainly in the times I have been in the area, has never been occupied and does not seem to be used very much. How do you justify hanging on to that? I think technically it is not yours but you have use of it.

Mr Assinder: Indeed. Perhaps I can lay out first exactly when it is used, and there is undoubtedly a flow of use and non-use and that changes not only over months and weeks but also over years and administrations as well. At the moment it is used every day and twice on Wednesdays for afternoon lobby briefings which vary in duration from 20 minutes or half an hour to an hour or even longer sometimes, depending on business. We have in the past—and this is something we hope to start up again, depending on the new Leader of the House—had regular briefings in there from the Leader of the House. Opposition leaders and other ministers have also in the past fairly regularly held briefings in that room. Frankly, I do not see any alternative other than to have a room specifically set aside for use by the lobby, and, of course, the Lobby Committee meets in there from time to time, but there will be periods in the day, specifically in the mornings, when it is not in complete use by us; that is certainly true.

Q149 Chairman: I hear what you say but does that need a dedicated space in that location of that quality?

Mr Assinder: At that point, did you say, Chairman?

Q150 Chairman: Of that capacity, if you like, and quality.

Mr Assinder: I see what you are saying. On an average day we are talking of about 30 lobby journalists in there at any one briefing. That can go up dramatically at periods of particular interest. It can fall back again as well to 10 or 15 but that is quite rare. As you can imagine, at the moment the numbers have gone up quite substantially. I just cannot see an alternative way of doing that because very often these lobby briefings can be at the drop of a hat. Most of us are routinely there at set times but we can have briefings called for fairly quickly and we need to have accommodation virtually instantly. A good example is that when the room was recently refurbished for us we had to be out of it for a period of time and it meant trying to hold briefings in the bar; it was the only place available and it was a complete disaster, not for the reasons you may think! It just did not work and, apart from just the physical difficulties of it, there are the inevitable issues about privacy. The lobby may well be on the record now but even so occasionally there are questions from the press and answers from the Prime Minister's spokesman that, with the best will in the world, are best kept on lobby terms, so the lobby will still occasionally go onto lobby terms. If you had a more open area where people were walking through that just would not work.

Q151 Mr Robathan: I notice that the number of desks has shrunk, and wandering through the lobby, as I have in the past, I always rather liked the scruffy, authentic feel it had of an old newsroom, but then I am a traditionalist. You are shrinking the number of people presumably, therefore; is that correct?

Mr Hurst: We will shrink the number of people with permanent desks and we hope that we can introduce more flexible use of some desks by journalists who can work by hot-desking, sharing desks and this sort of thing. We start from the same standpoint as you do, it appears, that we like the place the way it is. We have never made any complaint about our accommodation. Indeed, for the reason I gave at the outset, we are very pleased to have it. We think it is a very effective place to work, but the House authorities and the House of Commons Commission came to us and said it was overcrowded and they wanted to do some work on it and that we needed to have fewer people, fewer desks. It did not seem viable to me, for the same reason you are having this inquiry, to ask for more space from the Commons so we have had to shrink to fit. Any spare communal spaces in the Press Gallery are being converted into office space and that means giving up our current bar, for example, which will become offices and then our bar will be relocated into an area currently used as a cafeteria. We think we can work with 152 desk spaces which the House of Commons says is the maximum they will give us but we certainly would not be happy to go lower than that number. We think that would adversely affect our ability to report Parliament.

Q152 Mr Robathan: If I can just press you a little further on hot-desks, how often would all the desks be in use, if I can put it that way?

Mr Hurst: It is an interesting question. They are not in use constantly, for the reasons I gave at the outset. In my view a lobby journalist who is at his desk all day is not really taking advantage of the facilities you give us. Old hands like Mike will spend a long time in the Members' Lobby or elsewhere speaking face to face to Members of Parliament. That is the nature of the relationship between parliamentary journalists and Members of Parliament, so at any one time quite a number of the desks may be vacant but that does not mean they are not being used. We had a little survey by the architects doing this refurbishment work and it was at the suggestion of the Press Gallery that an architect came round on the hour every hour throughout a week and charted how often desks were in use, and he found that for a long time the space in the gallery is underused but there were peak periods, generally in the late afternoon, when a large number of people were at their desks writing copy, which is what ideally most of the people do. Incidentally, the Press Gallery is, I suggest, one of the most intensively used areas of the House of Commons because from seven o'clock in the morning and sometimes even earlier you will have the journalists from the *Evening Standard* and the regional evening newspapers, about 17 of them, who come in and do a very early shift with deadlines for that afternoon, and then throughout the day into

the evening there are the morning newspapers who, if there is a meeting, as there was last night, or votes, are here until 10 o'clock or much later. There are always staff from the national newspapers here on Sundays as well, so there is always something going on but it is not in peak use all the time.

Q153 Mr Ainsworth: Everyone has their own individual desk—152? You have got yours and Michael has got his?

Mr Hurst: Yes, that is correct.

Q154 Mr Ainsworth: How many hours a week do you think there are 152 different individuals there? There is going to be some variation, is there not? How many hours a week do people use their desks?

Mr White: The people who are doing the refurbishment of the gallery did what was almost a flow chart of the hours in order to understand it better. If you are interested we could provide you with that. There are peaks both in terms of days and—

Q155 Mr Ainsworth: What is your guess?

Mr White: I cannot speak for other people. Yesterday I was in at about half nine, if I remember, and left at about 8.15. This morning I had to go to the office and did not get down until noon.

Q156 Mr Ainsworth: It is a bit like Members, is it not?

Mr White: In an odd way our lives are affected by similar sorts of things.

Q157 Mr Ainsworth: I am just wondering why you need a desk of your own when you are skulking round the bar and the lobby. Why on earth do you need a desk?

Mr White: Charles Dickens, when he did it, needed to write and we have our computers; we need desks, but you are right: it changes. I was thinking about it a minute ago when we were talking about Members being in the lobby. I was in the lobby for an hour yesterday afternoon talking to Members. It is not the busy place it was because Members' lives have changed as well and the centre of gravity of this building, rather like from Bonn to Berlin, has moved to the east, has it not? A colleague of mine on *The Times* said a few weeks ago, "Mike, you do realise that Portcullis House is the new lobby?". That is where you loiter because of the traffic through Portcullis, it is true. That is one thing that has changed.

Q158 Mr Ainsworth: It is to the north.

Mr White: Well, anyway, my general point stands about the use of the building. I suspect the use of these committee rooms, to which I as an old gentleman am rather attached, has diminished given the modern facilities which exist in Portcullis. I do not know the answer but I assume so. I love being in them.

Q159 Mr Ainsworth: You absolutely have to have a desk and that desk has to be yours?

Mr White: Yes.

Q160 Mr Ainsworth: And cannot be shared?

Mr White: We have in our office somebody from *The Observer* who starts on Tuesday because he works on Saturday.

Q161 Mr Ainsworth: He works at your desk?

Mr White: No, he does not because, although he is there less than I am because it is a weekly newspaper and he is out and about more, he overlaps with me a lot and we just use it for the home affairs correspondent who comes in and says, "Can I have a desk to write up the Home Affairs Select?", and we say, "Use the *Observer* desk. They are not there". That is roughly how it works.

Mr Hurst: We do have to have desks in my view. I ask you to bear in mind that a lot of us are competing with one another so Michael and I, who are from competing newspapers, could not share a desk; we certainly could not share a computer terminal because if he looked at my screen or I looked at his I might take tomorrow's front page for *The Guardian* away, and so we all have our own computer systems which have to be relatively secure for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Q162 Mr Robathan: You never crib from *The Guardian*, do you?

Mr White: I cannot speak for all of my colleagues. Let me put it that way.

Q163 Mr Ainsworth: Just to follow up on the meetings which the Chairman was asking about, the only lobby briefings which take place there are the Prime Minister's official spokesman's briefings.

Mr Assinder: No; they are the only regular ones. We have recently had meetings with the Serjeant at Arms and the Leader of the House, Mr Hoon as it was then.

Q164 Mr Ainsworth: How many did you have with Mr Hoon?

Mr Assinder: How many people attended?

Q165 Mr Ainsworth: How many meetings?

Mr Assinder: Only one recently.

Q166 Mr Ainsworth: And one with the Serjeant?

Mr Assinder: But I must point out that it used to be a regular weekly event. It was Robin Cook when he was Leader who let them fall into disuse, as much by accident as by design, I think, and there have been ongoing discussions. There has been a change in the Leader of the House, as obviously you know, and each one has agreed in principle that it is a good idea probably to start them again and it has just not, for one reason or another, actually got off the ground.

Q167 Mr Ainsworth: So there is one every day for how long?

Mr Assinder: Each day it depends and, as I say, it can last from 20 minutes minimum probably to an hour.

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Q168 Mr Ainsworth: And for the rest of the time the room is standing idle?

Mr Assinder: Unless there is a committee meeting in there or a function which we have had in there occasionally as well. That would be right, yes.

Mr White: If I can interject, you are on to something to the extent that yes, the use has changed, but the recurring theme of this conversation is changing practice for all of us. When I started my first tour of duty in this building in 1976 you went to the lobby room and on Thursday afternoons the Leader of the Opposition in those days, who was this young thruster Margaret Thatcher, would hold a lobby briefing. It would be the Leader of the Opposition first, then the Leader of the House, or the other way round, and it would go on a long time, and then the Leader of the Opposition dropped out. Neil Kinnock decided he was not benefiting from this and I would not disagree with that judgment, so that was dropped. It was moved to the Leader of the Opposition's room, I think, at one stage to try and get it away from the lobby room and less adversarial. Then, as Nick just said, Robin Cook dropped it, we are not quite sure why, but even before then, for reasons we all readily understand, they used to send a press officer from Number 10. Whereas one had candid off-the-record conversations with the Leader of the House of both parties, and Norman St John-Stevas was an absolute scream who had a habit of referring to "The Blessed One" and "The Leaderene", that was when they started sending a press officer, but, of course, that changes the nature

of the event so it withered on the vine a bit, but, of course, it would be nice to have it back again. Jack Straw is a serious parliamentarian in terms of the way this building works so who knows? We would like it.

Mr Assinder: I have certainly detected, and I do not want to speak, obviously, of either the Leader of the Opposition or the Leader of the House, that this is now something people are looking at more positively. I am only saying this from past experience, but a Leader of the Opposition might well find the sort of briefing that you could have in that room quite useful.

Q169 Mr Ainsworth: But surely joint use is possible?

Mr Assinder: The only problem I see with joint use is with these lobbies that happen instantly. We will suddenly get a call. When I was Chairman, now Secretary, we would get a call from Number 10 saying, "We must do a lobby this afternoon". The Cabinet reshuffle was an obvious example. We have to wait around and just be told, "Ten minutes upstairs", but that happens more often than you might think, for a variety of reasons. The other thing which might be worth mentioning is that even when the Prime Minister's Official Spokesman is not there, out of the country, for example, he will still now phone in to that room. He has to have a secure point that he can phone into and do a conference call with us because there tends not to be a deputy doing it now. Tom Kelly will still want to do it himself.

Chairman: Thank you very much, gentlemen. It has been extremely helpful.

Witnesses: **Ms Gill Cheeseman**, President, Secretaries' and Assistants' Council, and **Mr Kevin Flack**, Secretary, Transport and General Workers' Union Parliamentary Staff Branch, gave evidence in private.

Q170 Chairman: Welcome to the committee and apologies for keeping you waiting so long, but it has been a long day and we are rather depleted, as you can see, because the House is so busy. As usual on a Tuesday, we find that there are lots of other attractions. We have received your evidence. Thanks very much for that. At the core of our inquiry is initially accommodation for Members, but attached to that are the difficulties that we have heard about from a lot of Members that they have in relation to staff accommodation and we would be interested to hear your views if you want to amplify any of the points you have made in your written evidence.

Mr Flack: The prime comment that we wish to make is that the accommodation for Members' staff should be allocated on the basis of need rather than trying to find a single model that suits all MPs because quite clearly there are almost as many different ways of running a Member's office as there are MPs. In particular the fact that all MPs appear to be allocated an office and an office for staff, whether or not they have any staff in London, is obviously causing an imbalance in the accommodation. There was one example which we did not include in our letter and which has been brought to my attention since of an office in Norman Shaw North that has been allocated to MPs' staff

and has not been used for eight years, but because all MPs get allocated an office for their staff it is sitting there empty. There is obviously always a demand for more office allocation from everybody within the parliamentary estate, so what we would like to see is a proper audit of how every MP uses his or her offices and that would help with some of the overcrowding that we have seen.

Ms Cheeseman: We are not advocating a free-for-all for Members that do have the bulk of their staff here. We believe that there should be a limit, as there is a limit on passes, so the limit would be a maximum of three desks per Member here rather than some Members now having four or five members of staff working in their Westminster offices. That is obviously not right and there should be a limit on the number of desks to go with the number of passes. There are lot of empty rooms, or locked rooms, which, as Kevin has said, have been allocated to Members and are not being used.

Q171 Chairman: It would be helpful to us if you wanted to drop a note to the Clerk with any specific examples of that, but you are making quite a serious point and it is one that has come up in the inquiry, which is that the figures show that there are about 1.9 members of staff for every Member but, of

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course, not every Member has a member of staff here and there are a few Members who have large numbers of staff. Are you saying that your view is that that impacts on the facilities and accommodation that are available for other members of staff?

Ms Cheeseman: It does, and also that impacts on health and safety in that some Members' offices are not big enough to have four or five members of staff in them. If there were a fire, or even because of the way they have their equipment plugged in, there could easily be an accident in these offices.

Q172 Chairman: As trade union representatives do you take up these breaches of "health and safety"? I am sure there are lots of cases where we could take the inverted commas away.

Ms Cheeseman: Yes, we do when we are told that but we have got to be invited into the offices to see. A lot of time we are coming up against the Members who are encouraging them to go in their offices or their staff offices. It is very difficult to go against a Member. You can raise it with the Serjeant at Arms Department but they are about the only people we can raise it with.

Q173 Helen Jones: There are some Members like me who do not have any staff here at all and do not want to have any. I am not aware of everyone being allocated an office for their staff; certainly I never have been, but how in that situation do you think we can cope with those Members who do not have staff here but might occasionally want to bring someone down without them having a desk allocated that they do not use or having to go through this awful rigmarole when you want to bring someone down for a week or so of trying to find somewhere to put them, which is a nightmare really? How do we accommodate that sort of thing?

Mr Flack: Off the top of my head I would say perhaps something along the lines of what is done with new Members straight after a general election where a room is allocated that has a computer terminal so that they have access if they have laptops or whatever, there is a telephone, there is desk space. I know a lot of staff who come down from constituencies use the e-library over in Portcullis House but perhaps there could be a room set aside. Obviously there are issues of security but perhaps a room could be set aside that had that space for people in that situation. Also, obviously, there would have to be an annual audit of what MPs' requirements were because maybe some MPs would want staff here, say, for three years and then as a general election took place would want them to come straight from constituency work, for instance. It could not be set in stone but this brings us back to the problem that you have not got one rule that suits everybody.

Q174 Helen Jones: If we were doing it surely we would have to do it for a Parliament. We could not allocate offices for three years and then expect to switch round again.

Mr Flack: No.

Q175 Helen Jones: I want to pursue this business of many MPs having quite a lot of staff here because we have heard evidence about whether there should be any sort of limit on the number that you can have. Is it your experience that in a sense there are too many passes being issued? Should the number of staff be linked to the number of passes? What is exactly happening because if you are only allocated three passes how are you managing to get four or five staff in?

Ms Cheeseman: In theory you are only allocated three passes but if you contact the Pass Office and ask for a fourth pass normally it is allocated to the Member. The other thing is that Members can get away with having interns or temporary staff on day visitors' passes providing there is somebody there that can go and collect them from downstairs in the building or from a pass office. They can just take them up there and they will be there for a month or two months. I do not think any of these people tend to be long term but they might be a month or two months and they still need a desk and somewhere to work from.

Q176 Helen Jones: How do you compare the accommodation for Members' staff with the accommodation for staff who work in the House? Would you say that the conditions of members of staff are worse or the same or is it variable? I must admit I have seen some rooms where secretaries are working and I think they are appalling.

Mr Flack: I suppose what we should have put on record at the start is that once the teething problems were ironed out Portcullis House has been a major improvement for the working environment of staff. I would not want you to think that that was not recognised. At the moment we have probably got more people working in offices without windows, which is a particular source of grievance.

Q177 Helen Jones: It is a source of grievance to the Members too!

Mr Flack: I think that probably happens less with the work of the House authorities, although I know there are places where they do as well.

Mr Robathan: Any information we could have on empty offices would be enormously helpful, but short of stalking the corridors we do not really know where they all are, whereas your members do know.

Mr Ainsworth: Patrick does.

Q178 Mr Robathan: He does not tell me! I am not entirely clear of your position, the Secretaries' and Assistants' Council. You work for a Member of Parliament?

Ms Cheeseman: Yes.

Q179 Mr Robathan: So you are elected by the Council. Is everybody a member of the Council automatically?

Ms Cheeseman: Because it is an All Party Group, and it was set up in 1974, the membership is £1 a year.

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Q180 Mr Robathan: I see, and how many members have you got?

Ms Cheeseman: I do not know because I am the President and not membership secretary so, I am sorry, I cannot help you there.

Q181 Mr Robathan: I know you have parties. I have seen parties advertised.

Ms Cheeseman: We have parties and we do lot a lot of campaigning and represent the interests of Members' staff. One of the things I do is that if a member of staff has a problem with their Member, of whichever party, because I have been here 24 years they come to me because there is no human resource or personnel department. That is a big role that we have and the union has. We are happy to represent anybody, whether it is on accommodation or anything else.

Q182 Mr Robathan: What about yourself, Mr Flack?

Mr Flack: I am Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union branch that covers just MPs' staff.

Q183 Mr Robathan: Are you full time?

Mr Flack: No, voluntary. I work for an MP, as do all of our members.

Q184 Mr Robathan: So you do not occupy any more accommodation than the trade union side does already?

Mr Flack: We do not have a trade union office but if it is on offer—

Q185 Mr Ainsworth: With regard to the purpose of the audit that you are proposing, and you can see the difficulties in terms of auditing Members' offices, throwing Members out if they do not really need all the space and giving their offices to newer Members

who have stuffed their offices full of staff, you were talking about the allocation of staff desks. Are you saying that that is never audited?

Mr Flack: I do not think it is.

Ms Cheeseman: I do not think it is. I think each Member is allocated a desk for their staff, or two desks, and if they do not use it that desk will be empty.

Q186 Mr Ainsworth: Are you saying that there are staff desks allocated to Members that are empty year on year?

Ms Cheeseman: Yes.

Q187 Mr Ainsworth: Members have been allocated a staff desk somewhere over in Norman Shaw North and despite that being empty for years and years they still do not use it? That happens?

Ms Cheeseman: Yes.

Q188 Mr Ainsworth: And Members can hang on to those staff desks and refuse to release them?

Mr Flack: We are not even sure that they are asked to release them.

Helen Jones: I have been through that myself, Chairman. The problem seems to me to be to get accommodation for staff who come up here occasionally. If you do not hang on to your desk when you bring anyone up here you have not got anywhere to put them; that is the real problem. If we could solve the first one we could then solve the second.

Chairman: That is a more obvious candidate for hot-desking.

Helen Jones: Absolutely, but if you try to negotiate it through the Serjeant at Arms when you want to bring somebody in it is a nightmare.

Chairman: That has been extremely helpful. Again, apologies for keeping you waiting so long. Thank you very much.

Written evidence

Memoranda from Members of Parliament

ADAM AFRIYIE

Are you personally satisfied with the accommodation you have, in terms of space, layout, quality, furniture and fittings, etc?

1. I am not satisfied with the space I have available as an MP. It is insufficient to perform my functions efficiently.
2. My office (** Upper Committee Corridor South) is perfectly adequate for 1 person to work from.
3. Positives:
 - Its position relative to the chamber is excellent.
 - The size is good for 1 person (my Head of Office).
 - The size is good for me to come and visit to sign post and to use outside working hours (ie when my Head of Office goes home).
4. Negatives:
 - I have nowhere to work from in privacy within the Palace of Westminster.
 - It is essential to an MP's job that they have a level of privacy for constituency, media and political reasons.
 - It is also important that a Head of Office and assistant can work privately—out of the hearing of other staff and each other.
 - If I were to use the office then my assistant and Head of Office would be unable to work effectively.
 - Much as I hate to raise the issue, there must be a concern regarding health and safety if more than one person works from this office!
5. Ideally, I require three rooms (one small and one large might suffice as an alternative):
 - one for me (out of hearing of staff);
 - one for my Head of Office (out of hearing of assistant and other staff); and
 - one for my assistant or assistants.

These rooms must be near each other.

Are your staff and colleagues provided with the accommodation they need?

6. No. As above.

What are your views on the allocation of accommodation between different types of user of the Estate (Members, Members' staff, House staff, Press etc.)?

7. The MPs and their staff should have priority. In Parliament, MPs are here to work efficiently on behalf of their constituents.

Do the current systems for allocating accommodation work fairly and effectively? How might they be improved?

8. No, but this is because there are not enough offices available. More “small” offices for MPs and their staff should be created near the Chamber. Even a “portacabin” would suffice if the walls were sound proof!

How should demand for accommodation at Westminster be managed?

9. The prioritisation is adequate (longer serving members have “better/bigger” offices), but every MP should have a minimum of two small offices near the chamber (and ideally three).

NICK AINGER

Are you personally satisfied with the accommodation you have, in terms of space, layout, quality, furniture and fittings, etc?

1. No.

Where no, please tell us about your needs, and how they might be met more fully

2. I was allocated an extremely small office in Star Chamber Court with space for one desk and no storage. My assistant was allocated a desk in a shared space, below ground floor level with one filing cabinet. Due to the sensitivity of the work many members of staff are asked to perform as well as the volume of paperwork that needs to be kept, this arrangement is unsatisfactory. Additionally, the furniture and fittings are unsuitable for the size of the office. When requesting a smaller desk so that an additional chair could be put in the office for meetings with staff, I was told it would not be in keeping with the existing furniture and therefore would not conform to Parliamentary Standards. Considering the office furniture is not antique or suitably functional, I find this policy extremely unhelpful. In addition, the furnishing rule that states each Member is only entitled to 3m of shelving seems completely ridiculous.

Are your staff and colleagues provided with the accommodation they need?

3. No. We are currently split between two offices at opposite ends of the Palace with no space in one of them for filing cabinets. Owing to the impractical rule of allowing only 3m of shelving per Member, there is a constant to and fro between offices to copy paperwork and other material. In addition, owing to the inflexibility of the House's furnishing policy, the space that is available is not used to its full potential. Both offices, due to their size, would benefit from slim-line furniture and improved wall storage space so that both my staff and I could both sit in the same office at the same time for a meeting and/or briefing. At present, this is not possible.

What are your views on the allocation of accommodation between different types of user of the Estate (Members, Members' staff, House staff, Press etc)?

4. I believe that the disproportionate number of office acquisitions made by the Sergeant at Arms is unfair to both Members and their staff. Whilst it appears that the SAA have acquired more office space in Portcullis House, 1 Parliament Street and Norman Shaw Buildings, Members and their staff have been moved to cramped, unsuitable and shared accommodation. I believe that it would only be right to allocate the shared office space, such as the lower ground floor in Star Chamber Court to the SAA and allow Members and their staff to use the offices currently occupied by the SAA. Their work is not politically or personally sensitive—as when dealing with sensitive constituency casework—and therefore there is not such an exigency for privacy.

Do the current systems for allocating accommodation work fairly and effectively? How might they be improved?

5. The current system for allocation accommodation does not work fairly or effectively. The needs and number of staff a Member has is not taken into account. Even in the circumstances where a Member has been allocated an additional office for their staff, the location of the office is not considered which is not conducive to an effective and efficient working environment.

6. I hope you will find my experience of the accommodation on offer at Westminster useful to your inquiry.

DR ROBERTA BLACKMAN-WOODS

1. My office space is excellent. I have sufficient space but my staff do not have the space required. My Parliamentary Assistant has a desk which he shares with three other members' staff and there are typically six or so staff members in an office which is not very big at all. This is without taking in to consideration the various interns I have in my office. The effect of the lack of space is that I have to share my personal office space with my interns which, as you can imagine, is not the best working environment.

2. I think the allocation of office space is fair but, as a new MP in 2005, I found it too slow as I was without an office for quite a while.

MR JONATHAN DJANOGLY

We need document scanners and filing software to move towards a paperless office.

MR PHILIP DUNNE

1. I have one secretary and one researcher. My secretary is in room *** in Norman Shaw South. However, the Serjeant at Arms' Department is unable to find my researcher a desk in a staff room. As a result, my researcher is now working from a small desk in my very small office, which is fine for single occupancy, but not for two people. This is very frustrating as there is an empty desk in room ***. However, I have bent over backwards to acknowledge the shortage of accommodation, while seeking to resolve my staff

accommodation problem. Frankly it does seem daft to me that there is a vacant desk which may or may not be needed in this parliament, but which must be kept vacant in case a colleague who currently has no staff desk wants one at some time in the future.

2. I am quite mystified why MPs are allowed to have three staff passes but there is clearly insufficient accommodation for them on the parliamentary estate. In addition, some colleagues of similar seniority, have accommodation for three members of staff whilst I, and I am sure other colleagues, can only accommodate one.

3. This leads on to the issue of telephone, fax and data lines which are available. This may or may not come within the scope of your review, but it is inextricably linked. It is woefully inadequate for an MP with more than one member of staff to have access to a maximum of four telephone/fax lines. For example, as I am in a different room to my secretary, we each have printers which double up as fax machines. Under existing arrangements I have no spare telephone lines to give my researcher a telephone. The provision of only two voicemails per MP is fine if there is only one member of staff, but it restricts everyone's efficiency if a secretary and a researcher have to share one line. I currently have three data lines. Were I to employ, never mind accommodate another member of staff, it seems that he or she would not be able to have another data line.

PAUL FLYNN

1. As your committee is examining accommodation perhaps they would consider criteria for ensuring the most efficient use of office space. While the committee may not find it practical to allocate offices, they could perhaps establish guidelines that would encourage a more transparent system. One splendid corner office remained empty for 10 months from July 2004. It has now been allocated to an ex-government minister following a ministerial re-shuffle. There is strong impression that the allocation of offices is used as an instrument of a patronage in a sometimes capricious manner. Decisions often fail to achieve an equitable and efficient use of space.

2. I have asked the whips responsible what the criteria are for allocating offices. Are seniority, workload, disability, age, staff numbers factors taken into account? I have had no substantive reply and a brief discussion revealed no criteria on which members can measure whether or not they are being treated fairly.

MR NICK GIBB

1. I am happy with my own office but am not happy with the accommodation for my secretary and researcher. They are situated in the *** Room in the basement floor of the main House of Commons building. There is very little natural light and my secretary has complained that it is an unpleasant place to work.

2. I should also like to be able to employ a third member of staff but am prevented from doing so by the lack of accommodation for a third desk.

HELEN GOODMAN

The standard of my room is good but I think it should be the absolute minimum that a Member should be offered a private office, separate from the office used by their staff.

JOHN HEMMING

1. I am quite pleased with the office I have although it would be nice to have a confidential meeting room nearby and I am constrained from taking confidential calls when anyone else is in the room.

2. My main problem remains the fact that I personally cannot use the PCD network.

KELVIN HOPKINS

1. I consider the current arrangements for the allocation of office space for Members to be profoundly unsatisfactory. Allocations are made by the Party Whips, and are used in effect as a disciplinary mechanism which should not be accepted in a modern Parliament.

2. One effect of this arrangement is a less than efficient use of the space available. Many Members have generous office provision but keep no staff at Westminster. Other Members are expected to work in with their staff in cramped conditions. In my view, allocation of Members' offices should be the responsibility of the House authorities within guidelines set by the Administration Committee.

3. My point is not simply to complain about my own less than adequate office accommodation but to have office allocation handed over to the House authorities. If this were done I am sure that all efforts would be made to meet Members' individual requirements as fairly as possible, taking proper account of staff needs, and proper length of service in the House.

MR GEORGE HOWARTH

1. I am fairly happy with my accommodation. It is conveniently situated, sufficiently spacious, adequately furnished and has appropriate fitting. The only complaint is that it is insufficiently heated when the weather is cold.

2. The accommodation for staff and, as far as I am aware, for colleagues is similarly adequate. Comparatively speaking, the general level of accommodation has improved markedly over the last ten years. I strongly doubt that any further accommodation is required for additional office space.

ALAN JOHNSON

I am satisfied with the accommodation provided and believe that my staff have the accommodation they need. It is permanent accommodation and that is the way I would want it to remain. If there is any suggestion that systems such as hot-desking should be introduced, I would want to record in advance my total opposition to such a change.

MR DAVID JONES

1. I am obliged to share an office with three other members. Fortunately, I am on excellent terms with all of them. However, there are times when the noise levels in the office are unacceptably high, making it difficult to work. This was a particular problem recently, when I was attempting to give careful consideration to a Bill on a line-by-line basis. I am also unable to hold meetings with visitors, and have to book a meeting room.

2. I do not believe that it is right that Members of Parliament should be expected to share offices; they are carrying out exacting work, much of which is of a highly confidential nature. I understand, of course, that office space is at a premium in the Parliamentary Estate, but was frankly dismayed when I learned that I would not have an office of my own.

3. It is extremely difficult to obtain accommodation for London-based staff. Members should be able to accommodate at least two members of staff on the Estate. It is also inconvenient that staff members are often accommodated some considerable distance away from the Member's office.

4. Fittings and furniture are of high quality and I am very satisfied with them.

SUSAN KRAMER

1. I just thought I'd make plea for MPs like me whose staff are located far from their offices.

2. I am in Speaker's House ***. My staff were originally located in Lower Ground but the lack of confidentiality from the open plan arrangement (never mind the lack of daylight) proved really problematic and we were lucky to have them relocated to 1 Parliament Street. However, we are constantly trekking across the buildings to discuss issues, sign letters etc. which is a serious inefficiency.

3. In any redesign, can staff and MPs be co-located?

ANN MCKECHIN

1. Since my election in 2001, I have had the same office based in Norman Shaw North (NSN). At the time of my arrival the staff apologised for the grubby and splintered paintwork but assured me that the offices were scheduled for repainting over the summer recess. I returned in the autumn of 2001 to find the room in the same condition and almost five years later it has still to be repainted. My conclusion is that there is no clear or transparent maintenance programme in place.

2. The upper floors of NSN were extensively refitted out a few years ago but to date very little has been done to this block for a very considerable length of time. I consider that this is probably the poorest quality block in the estate. The toilet accommodation on the ground floor for example is substandard and shoddy.

3. The room lighting consists of poor quality strip lighting which is uncomfortable after lengthy periods and cannot be adjusted. There is no air-conditioning and the room is difficult to ventilate in the summer. The only option is to open the window and be deafened by the traffic on the Embankment.

4. The room is adequate for one person but as Chair of a large All Party group I have two others to accommodate—one is in my room and the other is based in a nearby Member's Secretary desk. As a result I am unable to hold private meetings with visitors in the room—there is no space for them or privacy away from other staff members. If possible I think staff should be based in adjoining rooms rather than in the same room as Members.

5. Allocation of rooms is currently haphazard and non-transparent—I do not envy the job of party whips in attempting to allocate places but it inevitably leads to inconsistency. If possible it should be based on a recognised criteria of needs rather than seniority. Ideally I think each member should have a room with space in an adjoining room/space (as far as possible) for up to two members of staff with appropriate equipment and furniture including space to meet with visitors.

MR DENIS MACSHANE

1. I focus rather narrowly on two points. I do think there ought to be some rough rule of seniority that could be in play rather than it being very much in the hands of the whips who in my experience allocate on the basis of favouritism or a sense of reward and punishment.

2. The second point is that in the area around my office on the North Curtain floor I am astonished at the huge amount of office space that is available for, I think, library staff but which frankly never ever seems to be much used or occupied. There is, for example, a large office with a number of desks and workstations in it and I rarely see more than one or possibly two members of the staff in it and they are not there constantly during the day. There is also at the end of the North Curtain corridor a very large kind of relaxation room, which again never ever seems to have anyone in it at all. Attached to it is again a large space used as a kitchen. Given that the Commons is full of cafeterias and restaurants which everybody has to use pretty much on a shared communal basis I do not understand why this facility is any longer needed. Perhaps in past days when the Commons met while late into the night and often past midnight on four days a week there was some justification but there can be none now.

3. Certainly in my own room, which is about the size of an old-fashioned railway carriage, I have to work with two or three staff and it really is quite unpleasant. I have, to be fair, a shared secretaries' office over in Norman Shaw North but that does not make for easy modern office work when you need to be in a team discussing issues and problems and e-mails and appointments as they arise with staff rather than the old-fashioned system of the secretary or PA being locked far away and only seeing the MP once a day or once a week.

4. There do seem to be a number of rooms in my area of the Commons which are used for odd purposes and never seem to have much business going on inside them. I would have thought that these could be relocated to 7 Millbank and the rooms released for MPs and their staff. I hope this is helpful.

MR ROBERT MARSHALL-ANDREWS

1. This winter central heating failed in areas of the building. Electric fires were distributed but were inadequate.

2. My researcher's accommodation is dreadful. He shares a room (219) with four other staff (not mine) and has virtually no filing room. I appreciate this is the diktat and caprice of the Labour whips over which the committee has no control (who has?) but the crude inequities of accommodation which results in something the committee might well get on board.

JULIE MORGAN

1. I am writing to ask that accommodation should be found for a day nursery/creche in the Palace of Westminster. It seems to me that it is very important that we provide such a facility. I have just returned from the Scottish Parliament where they have a creche that is available for members, staff and visitors where children can be left for up to three hours.

2. On the old Administration Committee before the last election, there was lengthy discussion about providing a crèche—surveys were done and an area was tentatively earmarked.

3. I think that there is a need for such a facility and that there is room available for one. I hope that you will take this into consideration in your review of accommodation.

KALI MOUNTFORD

1. My current office is on Upper Committee Corridor South room ***.

2. I have previously had office on the opposite side of the corridor which is windowless and caused migraines. Prior to that I had been in Norman Shaw North, which is too far out.

3. The benefit of my current office is that the temperature is controllable and that is an improvement. Natural light is very welcome and I appreciate being in the House. The room is a bit small but I can cope with that. The window is welcome but has no catch so cannot be properly closed and is unlockable. The biggest issue is that I can hear every word said by my neighbours and that inhibits me. If anyone along the

corridor sneezes the rest of us know about it. I think quite small adjustments could make these rooms much more desirable. Sound insulation, window locks and more storage and these rooms would move from good enough to excellent.

MR KEITH SIMPSON

1. I would be grateful if your Committee could look into the question of the current furniture in Members' offices in Portcullis House. I understood that, when I moved into my office in Portcullis House five years ago, that the architect had established effectively a five-year veto, which did not permit any designer furniture being taken out of these offices.

2. The purpose of my letter is to say that I would love to have taken away the designer futon chairs, which might be suitable for a Japanese tea house but certainly do not meet the requirements of a 6'5" middle-aged male M.P., who was built more for comfort than speed!

3. I would be grateful if you could make representations to the Serjeant at Arms to see whether my futon armchairs could be replaced, asap, with the old-style, very comfortable green armchairs, and perhaps even a sofa, that can still be found in offices in parts of the Parliamentary Estate.

ANNE SNELGROVE

1. During the summer the office is extremely stuffy as the bars on the window prevent us opening the windows more than a crack. It becomes very hot and unpleasant, especially with computers etc running. A fan just recirculates the hot air and adds to the heat.

2. On the plus side I was very pleased with the redecoration of the office last summer.

MR ANDREW SLAUGHTER

1. I limit my comments to the accommodation I have provided to me and my staff on the estate. This consists of a single room some 15' x 6' plus alcove. I am entitled to a desk in a communal office but, for reasons of confidentiality and communication between staff this is redundant. Running a backbench MP's office is akin to running a small business, and I defy anyone to run such efficiently from this tiny space.

2. We have managed to squeeze three workstations and associated filing and storage into the room. During normal working hours there are three staff working here. There is therefore nowhere in the office for me to work until the evening. I doubt that this tragic-comic situation is what my constituents envisage when they telephone to be put through to this or that department of my office.

3. Either there is insufficient accommodation or it is inefficiently allocated.

4. The quality of furnishing, equipment and décor is generally very poor. The good thing about these premises—1 Parliament Street—is the staff who are very helpful and efficient. I am puzzled however, as to why I am not permitted to receive couriered packages, provided receipt of these is notified in advance. After one urgent package was locked away in the post room without notifying me I was informed there would be a review of this, but I have heard nothing.

GERALDINE SMITH

1. Members' accommodation is not always suitable. Office size is a particular problem; I share a small, cluttered office in Norman Shaw North with two assistants. The only help I have been offered in the past was a desk in an office on another floor, but this is impractical. The furniture and fittings are of an acceptable standard but the biggest difficulty is space.

2. The current system for allocating accommodation does not work fairly and effectively because accommodation is used as a political tool by the whips. It is not appropriate that they have the ability to move people around when accommodation is of a varied standard; if all offices were the same size it would not be so much of a problem. Perhaps it would be better if the Serjeant at Arms Department took on this responsibility instead.

3. As offices remain of such varied size and quality, it would be appropriate to base office allocation on seniority and the number of Members' staff working in London.

DR GAVIN STRANG

Are you personally satisfied with the accommodation you have, in terms of space, layout, quality, furniture and fittings, etc?

1. Yes.

Please identify what you appreciate about the accommodation you currently have

2. I have a decent sized room to myself, and can accommodate two or three visitors for a meeting round a table. I do not have to share with a staff member.

Are your staff and colleagues provided with the accommodation they need?

3. Yes.

Do the current systems for allocating accommodation work fairly and effectively? How might they be improved?

4. I have no complaint about the current systems.

How should demand for accommodation at Westminster be managed?

5. I am happy with the present arrangements.

JO SWINSON

I think it would be very helpful if a crèche were to be provided within the estate. While I am aware that a childcare voucher scheme operates for staff, there are some, including Members, who would find it easier to balance the responsibilities of family and work if their small children could be cared for on the estate. If Parliament is to attract a representative group of people to become MPs, this must include mothers and fathers with young children.

MR ANDREW TURNER

Are you personally satisfied with the accommodation you have, in terms of space, layout, quality, furniture and fittings, etc?

1. Yes—I have a large room on second floor of Norman Shaw North which accommodates me and my secretary, and a smaller nearby room for a research assistant. My office is very comfortable and my assistant's is adequate (if a little dark). The only problems with these are (a) distance to vote; (b) heating and ventilation. I would like to have a sofa and cannot see why they have been banned (if that is not merely an urban myth).

Are your staff and colleagues provided with the accommodation they need?

2. Yes.

What are your views on the allocation of accommodation between different types of user of the Estate (Members, Members' staff, House staff, Press etc)?

3. I asked a PQ about this some time ago. I suspect too much of the accommodation in the Palace is taken by non-essential staff, and more should be available to Members. But I wouldn't want my assistants to have a 10-minute trek to find me.

Do the current systems for allocating accommodation work fairly and effectively? How might they be improved?

4. I can't think of a fairer system, although they are hardly effective in the short period after elections. I would recommend having more people on hand to help Members staff pack and unpack to move from one place to another.

How should demand for accommodation at Westminster be managed?

5. We really should consider whether it is necessary for there to be so many staff at Westminster. Does anyone know by what factor staffing has increased in the last (say) 10 years? And although steps are being taken to redress the balance between Members' constituency-based and Westminster-based staff, the cost of accommodation here must be huge and the estate should be reduced.

MR SHAILESH VARA AND MR ROB WILSON

1. Both of us are presently sharing an office in the Norman Shaw South building (Room ***). We share the office with three of our staff (two of Rob's and one of Shailesh's). The office is designed for one Member and one staff.

2. Our office is clearly overcrowded and when a request was put in for reconsideration of office space, we were informed that our Party has no further offices to allocate to Members. Apart from the fact that we are not aware of any other Members having to share such cramped accommodation, we are concerned that we have both seen offices in our building which are empty. Moreover, we understand that on the 5th Floor there is a very large office which is being used, so it appears, by one support staff on her own.

3. A recent visit by the House's Fire Officer found that our office is a fire risk.

4. We have a number of difficulties. It is impossible for either of us to have any peace or quiet in the office with a view to doing serious work. We regularly have to leave our office and go out into the corridor to do radio interviews on our mobile telephones, or if we need to make a private telephone call, as our own office is far too noisy with other people. There are also difficulties concerning preferences as to TV volume, heating, opening of windows and so on. Neither of us is able to have meetings in the office.

5. Both of us are happy to stay in Norman Shaw South building as we have one secretary each on another floor of the building. However, we would be grateful if there could be an urgent review of our own office accommodation as, apart from being a fire risk under the Health and Safety Regulations, we feel that given the nature of our responsibilities, we should have more space. Put bluntly, the present situation is having an adverse effect on our ability to carry out our duties as Members of Parliament.

6. We are happy for anyone to visit our office and we would of course be happy to provide you with any further information that you may require.

DEREK WYATT

1. Accommodation. Personally satisfied? No—I have one member of staff in NSN sharing; I have another on her own and I have my room. I have applied for a larger room both in 2001 and 2005—to my own whips' office—but never had an acknowledgement of either my letters or a discussion about the problem; it is clearly not sensible to have my staff and me in three parts of NSN. The solution would be to take office accommodation anyway from the whips. What has it got to do with them? It is an administrative issue.

2. We should go for a big bang if we want to move staff out of corridors to make them one party only as has happened in Portcullis House; we can do this by ballot.

3. All offices and spaces in the House should be wireless.

Memoranda from Members' staff

A MEMBER'S SPOUSE (who has asked to remain anonymous)

1. The accommodation in the House set aside for families is not very good. For example there is no toilet facility in the wash room/changing room. The Family Room is sometimes used by Members, and by their staff (opening mail etc) and also by Members being interviewed. I know that space is at a premium in the House but I would ask if it is possible to provide a separate room for this. Would it also be possible to provide a cloakroom to accommodate visitors' coats and luggage? (I think the family room is often used for this purpose.)

2. I wonder if it would be possible to look at the rules regarding the Strangers dining room, to allow spouses to book a table for close family members (sons and daughters) when the dining room is not busy. I believe this used to be the case some time ago.

3. The toilets in the main building of the House really need upgrading and require better and more frequent cleaning.

JOY GREENFIELD

1. It seems to me that there are a significant number of unused desks. Members with far flung constituencies who are allocated desks but then don't use them should be approached to consider releasing them to those Members who have most of their staff working from the Palace of Westminster.
2. There is never enough desk space or filing cabinets and to see rooms unused cannot be right.

METTE KJAERBY

1. I have only one point for your consideration: A nursery on the Parliamentary estate for MPs and staff!
2. There is an urgent need for a nursery at the Parliamentary estate. I believe that the time has come for Parliament to have a nursery on site and be baby-friendly. This would make it easier for staff to balance work, home and social life. It would be of particular importance for many of the Parliamentary mums who wish to continue breastfeeding their children whilst working. Breastfeeding rates in the UK are to be ashamed of.
3. Bottlefeeding cost the NHS approx £12 million. Cases of gastro-enteritis treated by GPs cost the NHS a further £6 million. Breastfed babies are rarely hospitalised for gastro-enteritis.
4. I shall be very happy to give oral evidence as a midwife, reproductive health expert and a mum.

MATTHEW KORRIS

Excellent Accommodation

1. I am personally very satisfied with the office accommodation that I have been allocated. There is plenty of space available in the two connecting rooms in Portcullis House for my MP and her staff, with good storage facilities and decent furniture.

"Room" for Improvement

2. *Environmental*—I believe there is scope for much greater recycling from Members' offices. The paper recycling system is good, but consideration should be given to the possibilities of recycling plastic as well—there is significant waste from food packaging and plastic items in the mail. Any reconsideration of office space across the Parliamentary Estate should take this into account.
3. *Informal Areas*—Portcullis House was designed with informal areas on the 1st, 3rd and 5th floors that offered seating, vending machines and copies of most newspapers. These have been gradually removed, so that only the one on the 1st floor remains. The 1st floor is available to the public so it is often crowded, vending machines are emptied quickly, and newspapers go missing. The informal areas were removed to make way for more office space, which can be understood, but these facilities are much missed by Members and staff, especially those on higher floors. Some of these facilities could be accommodated in the photocopier rooms (see below).
4. *Photocopying Rooms*—it is very useful to have photocopying rooms in close proximity and they are well equipped. However the rooms have lots of unused space in them. I would suggest that they could be used to accommodate some of the facilities that were lost when the informal areas were converted into offices—they could certainly house newspapers or vending machines.

KARI MAWHOOD

1. My main suggestion is that a crèche/nursery should be provided for children of Members, their staff and officers of the House. This would promote excellent work-life balance and would ensure that staff could return to work sooner, should they chose to, safe in the knowledge that their children were close by in case of emergency. It would also encourage longer breastfeeding which is nutritionally advantageous to babies and helps build up their immune systems.
2. In addition, I think it is extremely important that MPs' staff should be located on the Estate which enables MPs to better scrutinise legislation and contribute to debates, because they have administrative and research expertise close at hand.
3. In terms of furniture, in PCH the choice is extremely limited—for example no square or rectangular tables are included (apart from the member's desk). In square offices, square tables are a better use of the space available. Square meeting tables in offices would be useful and would alleviate the demand on room bookings from Mondays to Thursdays.
4. Also, many offices store a lot more stationery in cupboards since the stationery office downstairs is no longer available, so there can be a shortage of cupboard space.

ANN PALMER

1. The offices are spacious in general terms, but seriously over heated. The manual means of reducing the temperature in the office inadequate as the range you personally control produces no measurable reduction in the temperature. To have to call someone to remove both carpets tiles & concrete floor tiles to rummage under ones desk to try and turn down the heating seems a madness, especially as again there is no measurable difference in the temperature once this palaver has happened.

2. The door handles are awkward to manipulate and have already fallen off.

3. The holes in the desks through which cables run are too small for a plug to fit through, thus table lamps cannot be moved beyond the range of the cable—really irritating, (the plugs themselves are sealed, so no solution there).

4. Re furniture in room ***. There are two very large awkward armchairs that serve no purpose at all other than to take up space and be difficult to move. Simple upright chairs with arms would be preferable for those taking part in meetings.

5. The standard of cleaning is desperate around the corridors and in the lavatories—the two bathrooms behind the lift shaft (Derby Gate end) on the third floor have to be experienced to be believed.

6. The shower cabinet in one leaks, so daily (it is used by someone daily) one is wading across a wet floor, in ones out door shoes, water plus dusty soles produce a muddy floor. The small bin to hold wet paper hand towels overflows by mid morning, so that one is confronted by a sea of wet paper to add to the general unpleasantness.

6. Weeks go by when there is no loo paper (despite requests), so the first task of a Monday morning is to search the other loos for spare rolls. Why whoever empties the bins each day is not tasked with replacing loo rolls is beyond understanding, as despite requests of cleaning ladies around the place, one is told this is not their responsibility.

7. The kitchenette area has improved of late, with less gunge being allowed to fester for weeks. Though a bug count by the Health & Safety police would no doubt produce levels worthy of the Guinness Book of Records.

8. Presumably the Accommodation Committee is not responsible for the inadequate reception in Portcullis for mobile phones. There is only one spot in rooms *** where it is possible on a good day to get a signal strong enough to take a call.

9. Other than the above the accommodation is fine and a huge improvement on having to hot desk in Parliament Street!

JOHN SLINGER

1. I work in Room ***, North Curtain Corridor. I cycle over seven miles to work each day. I am concerned that there are no shower facilities available for Members' staff in the Palace itself (I know there are facilities in Portcullis House, but this is too far to go at the beginning of the day with shower kit, etc).

2. Two of my colleagues in this office also cycle to work.

3. In the context of the ever increasing numbers of Members' staff cycling/running to work (which should be encouraged), I would respectfully recommend the following:

- That shower facilities are provided in each of the main working areas of the Palace (so that they are easily accessible within 2–5 minutes walking).
- That there is a “drying” room (it needn't be large) to dry wet clothes in poor weather conditions.

4. The provision of locker space (not in the Member's office) for storage of personal belongings as in most places of work.

REBECCA SMITH

We face a lack of paper storage and file space. Each member is provided with one cupboard in which to store files and stationary, and one set of shelves which are difficult to reach. Compared to colleagues working in other parts of the Parliamentary estate, we feel that we are slightly disadvantaged with the amount of storage space provided. Compared to rooms in Portcullis House which have significantly more shelf and cupboard space, we certainly have to be much more imaginative in how we organise things.

BARBARA STEVENS

1. I regret that the Committee did not walk round the whole of the secretaries' area and missed giving the opportunity for a number of other staff working in the area to talk to members and to hear their views and ideas. My desk is at the end nearest to the ladies toilets and the kitchen.

2. Lighting is a problem and all of us find the continual gloom tedious, not knowing whether it is day or night, rain or shine. Could not the side offices be opened up to let in more daylight? A modernisation plan of the area to provide more light and brighter surroundings would be welcome—there is too much brown at the moment.

3. We do like the comradeship of the area and none of us is keen to be isolated and shut away in a closed office with no contact outside its four walls. However, to lessen noise and disruption from other colleagues around us, it would be preferable to have only two people in an "alcove" instead of the present three.

4. It would also be preferable if the MPs for whom we work could have their offices closer to ours—mine, for instance, is miles away up on the 3rd floor, which does not make for the most efficient working relationship.

5. It is inconvenient for the last post on a Friday or during recess to be at 5 pm in our area. Can this be revised to 6 pm to fit in with working patterns of many of us who continue to be busy during these periods? Postmen collecting in this area say this is quite possible with little disruption to their rounds.

6. The photocopiers, although much improved during the past months, are now beginning to show wear and tear again. New ones would lessen frustration and time wasted in trying to find the most reliable of the machines to use. One colour photocopier in the area would also be helpful.

7. Collection of confidential waste is utterly inefficient. It took two weeks for one bag to be collected from my desk just recently and this is a recurring problem.

8. The kitchen—this is a disgrace. It appears to be no-one's responsibility to keep it clean, ie wash the fridges or cupboards inside and out. The only way the fridges received attention recently was when the electricity gave out, the ice box was completely iced up, and they de-frosted as a result until the electricity supply was restored. Tea cloths could be changed more frequently and the supply of paper towels kept up regularly. There also appears to be a problem with the provision of washing-up liquid. A washing up brush would be helpful and none has been forthcoming despite a request about one year ago. There is also a problem with china and cutlery from the canteen being dumped in the kitchen and left there, sometimes unwashed, for a considerable length of time.

9. The ladies toilets could be modernised and brightened up. The toilets themselves do not flush efficiently, the taps often stick so cannot be turned on or off and some of the locks on the doors do not work because the lock is out of alignment. This has already been reported. I think the floor needs to be thoroughly cleaned, not just a mop dragged over it.

10. It would also be helpful to have up-to-date London residential and business telephone directories in both sides of the area.

Memoranda from House of Commons Staff

JENNY DOUGLAS (Serjeant at Arms Department)

1. I know how short of space we are on the estate, but I do think that the SAA office keepers' and the Senior office keepers' rooms should be looked at. There are four of us cramped in a very small office and the three seniors are in a similar desk space.

2. We have very little accommodation for the need of one to one interviews or any private meetings, as we all know the conference rooms are always booked.

3. So please could we also have a little consideration if there are any rooms available in the future. Thank you.

ALEX FULLER (PICT)

1. Generally the accommodation for my work area works well for me and we are moving back from temporary accommodation in 4 Millbank to 7 Millbank where an open plan floor arrangement is being created. However, we have been told that we have less space available compared to the number of people expected to utilise it and this is going to be overcome by hot desking. I am not too keen on hot desking as my area of work really needs to have our team seated together but I am prepared to give it a go if necessary. Nothing ventured nothing gained.

2. I would like to suggest that we do increase the following areas though.

-
- I would like to see more meeting rooms which staff can book that are set out into a less formal way, possible with “easy chairs”.
 - We do not have many areas where staff can go for a quiet lunch outside of the restaurants. It would be nice to have some easy chairs and comfort areas where you could take some sandwiches rather than sit at your desk or use valuable space in the canteens.
 - I feel that we lack enough training rooms as they are in great demand and this makes scheduling training difficult if you are not fortunate enough to have rooms dedicated to your workload.
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Memorandum from the Advisory Committee on Works of Art

The Works of Art Committee request that the Administration Committee as part of its accommodation review consider whether space could be allocated for:

- (a) A permanent exhibition space for items from the House of Commons collection, perhaps in the new Visitors Reception Building or proposed Visitor Centre; and
- (b) A more modern, on-site storage facility for the House of Commons collection. Works are currently kept in an awkwardly located room which does not have suitable climate control and which is too small.

20 January 2006

Memorandum from the Trade Union Side of the House of Commons Whitley Committee

1. The House needs to employ sufficient permanent, trained staff to deliver services and provide the resources that Members (and the House Service) need. The employer has to ensure these staff have adequate accommodation to produce their work.

2. Many staff, such as some from Hansard and Clerks, must work in close proximity to where the House performs formal business, the Chamber and Committee Rooms for example. Or they work in places in the Palace where Members wish to have access to facilities such as the Library and catering outlets. These staff should have good accommodation and facilities near their work—which meet decent space, health and safety standards, and reasonable standards of security.

3. There are clearly competing demands for space. It is difficult, within the finite confines of the Palace and parliamentary estate, for the two Houses to both provide more of the services that Members demand, delivered by the House corporately, and provide more space for Members’ own staff at Westminster.

4. Ever more pressure on facilities is exerted by the numbers of personal staff Members employ at Westminster. There should be a presumption that what assistance to Members can be provided in the constituency, should be provided there. There should therefore be a cap on the number of category 9 passes available for Westminster.

5. Some services at present provided in the Palace have their scope and efficiency limited by constraints of accommodation, and staff, as a result, suffer from poor morale and cramped working conditions, with knock-on effects on health and safety considerations. We would be willing to consider appropriate management proposals to provide such services elsewhere, if this led to better service provision and less inadequate staff accommodation.

6. The former Lord Chancellor’s Department is to move out. Its accommodation should be reallocated, to the benefit of both House services.

7. Party political staff should be accommodated in the parties’ own premises, not in Parliamentary accommodation.

8. The Committee should examine space currently allocated to lobbying organisations or others not directly employed in providing services for Members and their staff.[p1]¹

9. The Committee should examine what continuing business need there is for private residences within the Parliamentary Estate. Although it may be very convenient for certain officers to reside on the premises, an assessment should be made of the relative utility to the institution of that convenience and gaining more space (as we understand some residences have nine or 10 rooms).

13 February 2006

¹ [p1]If this is to go in we will need examples of such wasted space.

Memorandum from the Transport and General Workers' Union Parliamentary Staff Branch

1. Our branch is concerned that accommodation for MPs and their staff should be allocated fairly, on basis of need. It is understood that Accommodation Whips could use political criteria for allocation of offices, or that offices could be allocated on the basis of seniority, rather than the actual needs of the MP and their staff.

2. It is believed that an audit of all MPs' offices would show a number that are never used and these could be reallocated to reduce overcrowding.

3. It is appreciated that the Houses of Parliament are unusual workplaces, but it is felt that Parliament should set an example of "best practice" in terms of health and safety, floor space allocation per MP/member of staff and windows. It is felt that in this day and age no-one, MP or staff, should be expected to work in offices without natural light.

4. The issue of the possibility of more MPs' staff moving to constituency offices was discussed, and our branch wishes to stress that this should be a political choice left to the MP rather than dictated by an attempt to reduce the number of offices used by MPs' and their staff at Westminster.

15 February 2006

Memorandum from the Parliamentary Press Gallery

1. The Press Gallery represents the 300 or so journalists accredited by the Serjeant at Arms for passes to the House of Commons. Of these around 170 Lobby and Gallery journalists are based in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, which is their permanent place of work and has been used by parliamentary reporters at least since the Press Gallery Committee was formed in 1881. By custom, the House has made an overall allocation of accommodation to the Press Gallery and reporters are allocated desks within in by its Honorary Secretary.

2. In 2003, the then Serjeant at Arms and House of Commons Commission informed the Gallery that the Parliamentary Estates Directorate wished to carry out refurbishment work to its accommodation in order to meet health and safety requirements. We are fond of our warren of rooms and desks, which some of us have known and used for many years. But we understand what drives the Commission's policy with regard to modernising the physical framework of the Palace of Westminster and have done our best to co-operate and to carry our members with us.

3. An outline plan was subsequently agreed under which works will take place in 2006 and 2007 and the number of work spaces in the Press Gallery would fall to 152. In addition to a net reduction in the number of desks, the Press Gallery has had to accept further difficult compromises in order to meet the legitimate wish of the House authorities to modernise its facilities and make its accommodation compliant with relevant regulations. These are, chiefly: cutting the number of rooms allocated for catering from three to two and converting the current Press bar for office space; giving up the current Press Library for office space; and converting the Commonwealth Writing Room, which is presently used for monitoring select committees, into office space.

4. The Press Gallery has in this process raised no complaint about its accommodation, nor asked for additional working space, nor requested that the House spend additional money on its behalf. Its prime interest throughout has been that journalists should continue to have an effective working environment adjacent to the Reporters' Gallery of the Commons and within very easy reach of the Committee Corridor, Member's Lobby and other meeting places within the Parliamentary estate. Whether national or local, print or radio and TV journalists, we feel we are part of the daily fabric of parliamentary life and are proud to be so. The Press Gallery has no view on the allocation of accommodation elsewhere in the Parliamentary estate, other than to wish the review well. If there are points you would wish us to explain or to answer, we are at your disposal.

17 February 2006

Memorandum from the House of Commons Health and Safety Committee

1. The House of Commons Health and Safety Committee asks that the Administration Committee take health and safety aspects into account in making its recommendations. The Committee is aware of the need to make the best use of the available accommodation and would like the following matters to be considered.

2. Reducing the number of offices for staff may result in overcrowding, which is already a problem in some areas. It is important that sufficient work space is available in offices.

3. It is a major cause of staff dissatisfaction when rest facilities are not available or are taken out of use. Using cafes as rest areas has limitations. Staff are encouraged to take breaks from their work stations, for health and safety reasons. Reducing the number of rest facilities may result in staff taking fewer breaks, with consequent health problems.

4. The House provides limited sleeping accommodation for staff who undertake occasional late duties. Concern has been expressed about there being any reduction in this space.

17 February 2006

Memorandum from the Public & Commercial Services Union (PCS) House of Commons Branch

REST ROOM FACILITIES

1. The PCS believe it is incumbent upon the House Management to provide adequate rest room facilities. So many staff today spend hours in front of a computer screen without recourse to a room to “wind down” during their lunch/rest break.

2. When we say rest room facilities we mean somewhere free of noise via electronic apparatus, ie television, radio, personal music players of any sort, the dreaded mobile phones, plus laptops and any other equipment that will invade another person’s immediate/local space.

3. Some House departments are better than others in providing rest room facilities. The Clerk’s Department staff in the Main Building do not have any facilities whatsoever when it comes to being away from their desks for a non-working period. We are talking of 80 plus staff~, some of which either have their lunch/rest break at their desks, or compound the catering facilities problem by going unnecessarily to the overcrowded cafeterias and spending the bare minimum in order to get away from their workstation.

4. The police have facilities most House staff could only dream about, when set against what is available to departmental staff.

5. This is no reflection on the good relationship the PCS has with the Clerk’s Department Management. We appreciate accommodation is at a premium in the Palace.

6. It is not the intention of the PCS to quote the various health and safety acts on this issue. All we are seeking is best practice and consistency across all House departments, for the benefit of all staff.

30 March 2006

Memorandum from the Serjeant at Arms on behalf of the Board of Management

1. ACCOMMODATION OVERVIEW

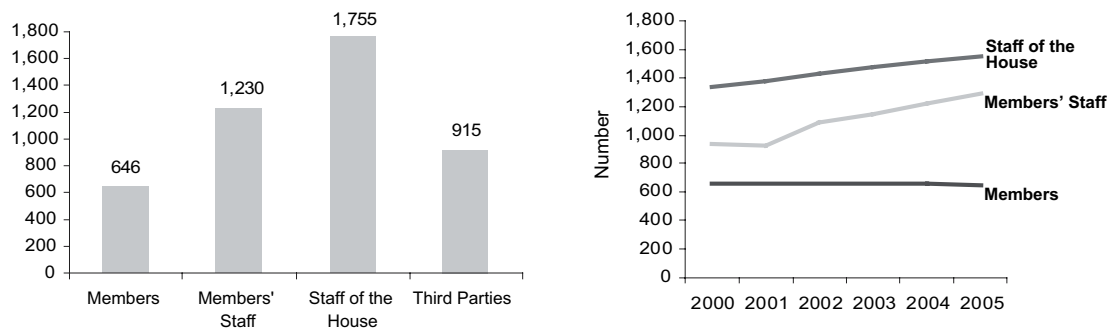
Estate Population

1. The House of Commons Estate currently supports some 4,500 occupants, of whom 646 are Members, approximately 1,230 Members’ staff and 1,755 staff of the House. The remaining 916 are “third party” occupants: organisations provided space on the Estate but not directly funded by the House of Commons Commission (such as the Press and contractors, eg the Post Office).

2. Although the number of Members has recently dropped from 659–646 as a result of boundary changes, the population of their staff and the supporting organisation has grown in response to the increasing business of Parliament. Between 2000 and 2005 the number of Members’ Staff increased by approximately 28%, and the number of Staff of the House increased by 14%.

Figures 1 and 2

CURRENT POPULATION OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ESTATE AND ESTATE POPULATION GROWTH 2000-2005



3. During this period, the leases of 3 Dean’s Yard and 10 Great George Street were surrendered, but the size of the Estate increased with the opening of Portcullis House in August 2000. Portcullis House is predominantly Members’ accommodation and the net effect of the changes was to increase the space available for Members and their staff by approximately 20%.

Accommodation Usage

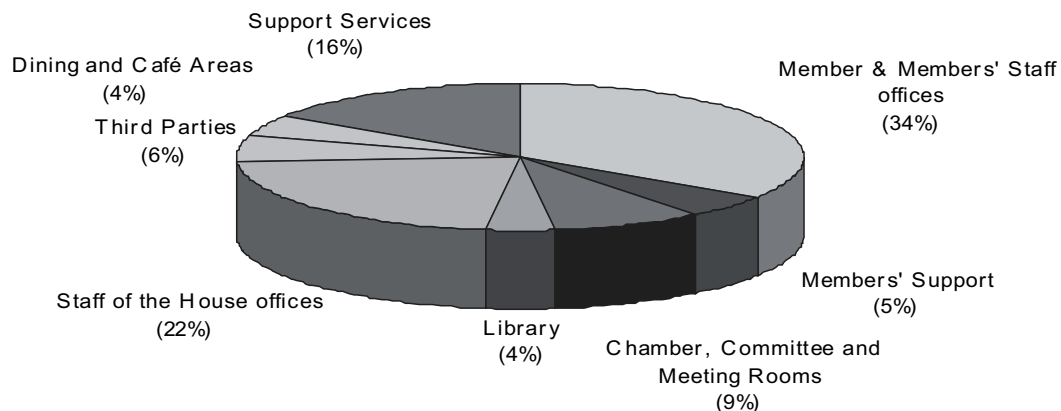
4. The House of Commons Estate comprises approximately 60% of the Palace of Westminster, six owned buildings within the security perimeter of the North part of the Estate (Portcullis House, Norman Shaw North and South, 1 Parliament Street, 1 Canon Row and 1 Derby Gate), and two leased buildings (7 Millbank and 2 The Abbey Garden). This does not include staff residences and sleeping accommodation.

5. Of the 116,000m² of internal space on the Estate, 47% is “unusable” area, that cannot be assigned to occupant groups. The main unusable elements of the Estate are: 18,600m² of hallways and lobbies (16%), 12,700m² of corridors (11%), 9,400 m² of plant rooms (8%), and 5,100 m² of stairs and lifts (6%). For comparison, this ratio is between the Royal Courts of Justice (c. 65% unusable) and efficient modern office developments (c. 15–20% unusable).

6. This leaves 60,300m² of usable space, of which 37,500m² (62%) is office accommodation. The distribution of the usable space across the main functions of the House is shown in Figure 3 on the following page.

Figure 3

PROPORTION OF USABLE AREA OCCUPIED BY HOUSE FUNCTIONS



Members’ Support includes Parliamentary Resource Centres, Speaker’s Accommodation, Members’ Cloak Room.

Library excludes Library Department staff office areas.

Dining and Café excludes kitchen, production, dishwashing and catering storage areas.

Support Services includes kitchens, storage, photocopy rooms, training, tea points, showers and lockers.

(Source: Archibus 2006)

7. Although the Palace constitutes 52% of the overall internal area of the Estate, owing to its architecture it only contains 38% of the usable space. The distribution of usable space shown above for the whole Estate is similar in the Palace itself, with the main differences being a greater proportion of Chamber and Committee Meeting areas (17%) and less staff of the House offices (13%).

8. The 2003 Accommodation Review identified a demand-led culture with regard to accommodation on the Commons Estate. This is partly due to a low awareness of the cost of occupancy. As yet, no mechanism has been successfully developed for calculating Estate occupancy costs.

9. By way of illustration, the total cost of occupancy per person for companies in prime central London real estate (including utilities, maintenance, services and facilities management) would typically be in the range of £10,000–15,000 per person per year.

10. Data and policies within this report are primarily drawn from the HOK Accommodation Review, approved by the House of Commons Commission in January 2003, copies of which have been made available to the Administration Committee.

2. MEMBERS

11. Members' accommodation is provided in five of the nine buildings on the Estate (the Palace of Westminster, Portcullis House, Norman Shaw North and South and 1 Parliament Street). Members and their staff occupy 20,600m² (58%) of the office accommodation on the Estate. Of this space, Members themselves occupy 45%, some 9,200m².

Figure 4

MEMBERS' DESK SPACES

	<i>POW</i>	<i>PH</i>	<i>NSN</i>	<i>NSS</i>	<i>IPS</i>	<i>Total</i>
Desk spaces	233	208	102	43	59	645
Office area (m ²)	3,063	3,305	1,310	693	842	9,213
Density (m ² /p)	13.1	15.9	12.8	16.1	14.3	14.3

— Excludes Speaker's accommodation.

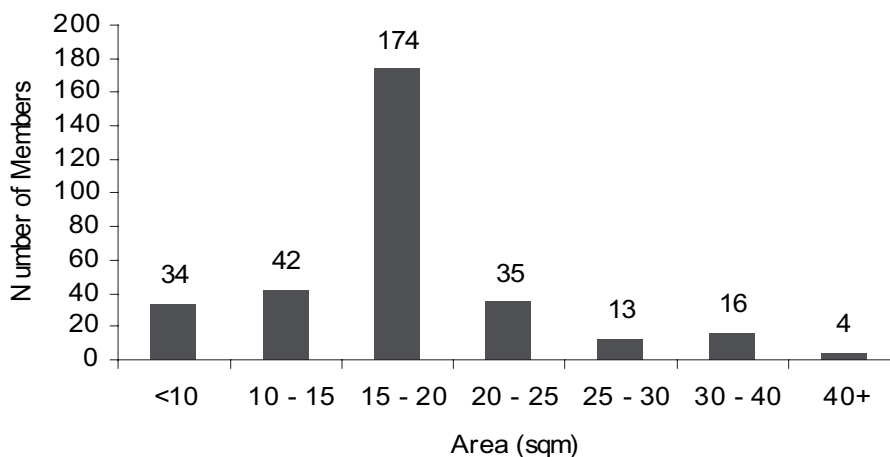
(Source: HOK 2005 Election Tool; PAD 2006)

12. There is considerable variety in the size and configuration of Members' accommodation across and within buildings. Members may occupy a private single office with their staff located elsewhere, a suited office with their staff in an adjoining room (an arrangement which predominates in Portcullis House), or an office shared with their staff.

13. There are more designated Members' offices than there are Members. The three Accommodation Whips allocate a supply of 721 designated Members' offices totalling 14,800m², including 126 Official rooms (Whips, Ministers, Shadow Cabinet), between the Parties. Of these, 318 offices are occupied solely by Members (including rooms forming part of a suite), 327 by Members sharing with their staff (including 54 rooms forming part of a suite), and 76 by staff only. In addition, the Serjeant at Arms provides a further 5,800m² to accommodate Members' staff. Figure 4 above splits out only the space actually occupied by Members. Figure 5 below identifies office sizes for singly occupied Members' offices.

Figure 5

DISTRIBUTION OF MEMBERS' SINGLE OCCUPANCY OFFICE SIZES



(Source: HOK 2005 Election Tool. Sample: 318 offices solely occupied by Members.)

14. The planning guideline for Members' accommodation recommended by the 2003 Accommodation Review is 12.5m². When applying this to single occupancy offices, the recommended range is 10.5–15.5 m². Above 15.5 m², it is recommended that the room becomes multiple occupancy.

15. For comparison, senior executives in modern corporate organisations and government offices in London typically occupy offices of 13.5m². In a 2005 HOK survey of City Law Firms, partners' single offices were an average of 13m², and shared double offices were 16.5 m².

Members Accommodation Below Standard

16. 58 Members' rooms are less than 10.5m², at an average of 8.8m² per room. Almost all of these rooms are in the Palace (in Star Chamber Court and the Upper Committee Corridors); some Members may judge that the benefit of close proximity to the Chamber outweighs the inconvenience of the tighter space.

17. Six rooms in the internal part of the Lower Ministers' floor have no natural light, and 39 rooms in the Upper Committee Corridors only have small roof-lights, and are not suitable in their current condition for long periods of occupation. These rooms are acknowledged by the House Authorities as a problem and solutions are being considered.

Ministerial Accommodation

18. 70 rooms, totalling 1,300m², are allocated to Government Ministers, most of whom are also provided a dedicated office within their Ministry building, which is typically their primary place of work. As a result, a number of prime rooms with close proximity to the Chamber are under-utilised.

19. By observation, it appears that a third of these rooms in Lower and Upper Ministers' and Star Chamber Court are used frequently, a third occasionally, and a third rarely.

Opposition Accommodation

20. Designated Shadow Cabinet accommodation is 170m² in the Shadow Cabinet Block. However, in 2003 the official opposition chose instead to occupy 380m² of office space on the second floor of Norman Shaw South.

21. The Liberal Democrat Leader's accommodation consists of four rooms totalling 80m². It may be difficult to accommodate the new Leader's support team in the available space.

3. MEMBERS' STAFF

22. The number of Members' staff on the Estate is difficult to capture accurately because of the transient workforce of researchers and interns, part-time staff and staff shared between Members.

Figure 6

MEMBERS' STAFF DESK SPACES						
	<i>POW</i>	<i>PH</i>	<i>NSN</i>	<i>NSS</i>	<i>IPS</i>	<i>Total</i>
Desk spaces	288	405	267	145	125	1,230
Office area (m ²)	2,851	3,501	2,451	1,474	1,078	11,355
Density (m ² /p)	9.9	8.6	9.2	10.2	8.6	9.2

(Source: HOK Election Tool 2005 and manual desk count 24-02-06)

23. According to a recent desk count, the average number of staff located on the Estate is 1.9 per Member. Up to 80 Members choose to locate no staff on the Estate at all. Members' staff occupy rooms shared with their Members, additional rooms allocated to Members by the Whips, and designated staff rooms or pooled staff areas such as the Lower Secretaries' Area below the Chamber.

Figure 7



(Source: Pass Office data February 2006. Includes Conservative resource units)

24. Although Pass Office data indicates that only five Members have more than five passes, the manual desk count suggested that 21 Members actually locate five or more staff on the Estate.

25. Members have choice in the location of their staff between Westminster and their Constituency. The impact on resources, accommodation and facilities of Members locating their staff on the Estate was recognised by the SSRB, and the 2003 Accommodation Review recommended the investigation of incentives to encourage Members to choose to locate new staff in the Constituency. However, no solution to this issue has yet been agreed.

26. In addition to staff working directly for Members, there are nine Parliamentary Labour Party staff and 14 Conservative staff in resource units located around Cloister Court in the Palace, and 10 Liberal Democrat researchers in 2 The Abbey Garden.

4. STAFF OF THE HOUSE

27. Staff of the House are organised in six Departments and the newly formed PICT Department. Figure 8 shows the total number of staff and office area occupied. The ostensible square metres per person calculation (7.5m²) does not accurately reflect office occupancy density, since about 25% of Staff of the House are peripatetic or work in public areas, such as Attendants, Doorkeepers, catering staff, receptionists and engineers. Excluding these non-desk based staff, the office occupancy density figure rises to 10.5m² per person.

Figure 8

TOTAL NUMBER OF STAFF
OF THE HOUSE

Total Headcount	1,735
Office area (m ²)	13,140
Density (m ² /p)	7.5

28. Figure 9 below shows a detailed breakdown of staff by Department. The occupancy density calculations exclude non desk-based staff (shown in brackets).

Figure 9

STAFF OF THE HOUSE DESK SPACES

	<i>POW</i>	<i>PH</i>	<i>NSN</i>	<i>NSS</i>	<i>IPS</i>	<i>ICR</i>	<i>IDG</i>	<i>2AG</i>	<i>7MB</i>	Total	<i>Density</i>
Clerk's Dept	83		1					9	241	334	13.6
Vote Office	5(7)	2	17		9				8	41 (7)	8.8
DFA	2							4	184	190	10.1
Library	31	1	19	13			177			241	8.4
Official Report	56								75	131	10.4
PCD				4					83	87	8.9
Refreshment Department	33(182)	5(44)			1(18)				9(28)	48 (272)	10.0
Serjeant at Arms	66(99)	13(23)	8(18)	4	3(10)	77		1	13	185 (219)	9.0
Total Headcount	276	21	45	21	13	77	177	14	613	1,257	10.5
Non-office headcount	(357)	(67)	(18)		(28)				(28)	(498)	
Density (m ² /p)	11.8	13.8	14.8	10.6	9.4	9.0	7.7	14.1	10.3	10.5	

— Departmental numbers reflect YE'05 status with regard to staff now allocated to PICT.

— Office of the Clerk included in Clerk's Department figures.

— Variations in Archibus space labelling and inclusion/exclusion of corridors may affect some density calculations.

(Source: Archibus 2006 and HOK Estate Occupancy Report 2004, updated February 2006)

Location on the Estate

29. HOK's 2004 "Estate Occupancy" study evaluated the location requirements of Departments of the House and Third Party Occupants of the Estate against a framework of weighted criteria. This established the nature of each group's requirement for regular physical interface with the core functions of the House, its Committees, Members and their staff, and for supporting visitor, security and maintenance requirements.

30. The study concluded that 75.5% of these functions do require physical location on the Estate in order to support the increasing needs of Members for high quality, responsive services. The remaining 24.5% are eligible for further analysis, should the capacity of the existing Estate be exceeded, or if new groups require location on the Estate. The majority of these functions are located in outbuildings such as 7 Millbank and 1 Derby Gate. Such a review would need to consider factors such as operational change and disruption, critical mass, degree of proximity, cultural change and a cost/benefit analysis.

Improving Space Utilisation

31. There have been a number of recent initiatives within Departments to make better use of existing accommodation, improve business efficiency, reduce space occupied by filing, and adopt more open, flexible ways of working, eg team spaces. The most recent example has been the new PICT department which has reviewed its space requirements, taking into account its business needs and the opportunities provided by better use of technology. The result has been a significant reduction in the space occupied per person.

32. This kind of review could be appropriate in other areas too. For example:

- Examine the scope for grouping staff together in accordance with business needs, eg Members' staff or Departments where current accommodation is highly fragmented (such as the Library).
- Align space more effectively for groups that have moved into space originally designed for different occupants (eg the Committee Office in former Member areas of 7 Millbank).
- Examine the potential of home working and mobile technologies (including WiFi and improvements to telephony) to enable increased use of hot desking, and mobile working enabled by the provision of communal touch down areas across the Estate.
- Review the space occupied by filing and documentation in the light of proposals to improve electronic document and records management across the House.

Accommodation below Standard

33. Offices for staff of the House are generally of adequate quality. However, there are a number of areas on the Estate where staff accommodation is below standard (eg windowless or poorly ventilated offices) or not appropriate for its present use. Some examples are:

- Department of the Official Report accommodation on the North and South Bridges off the Upper Committee Corridor.
- The Parliamentary Recording Unit and the control rooms and technical areas used for the televising of Parliament (operated and maintained by an outside contractor, which employs around 30 full-time and freelance staff) located in the basement of 7 Millbank.
- Some areas in 1 Canon Row, and Boiler House Court, occupied by the Serjeant at Arms' Department.
- The small size of the Lower Table Office affects the level of service that can be provided to Members.

34. In addition, technical staff and contractors, who provide essential support services, occupy poor quality basement accommodation in the Palace and outbuildings.

5. THIRD PARTY OCCUPANTS

Figure 10

THIRD PARTY OCCUPANTS OCCUPYING SPACE ON THE ESTATE

<i>Category</i>	<i>Primary Locations</i>	<i>Staff</i>
Police and Security	Palace (mainly Lords areas); 1 Canon Row	474
Press	Palace	174
CPA and IPU	Palace; 7 Millbank	22
Broadcasting and Recording	Palace; 7 Millbank	33
Services	Palace; Portcullis House	79
Amenities and Clubs	Palace; 1 Canon Row	13
BAPG	7 Millbank	1
Ex-Members' Committee	2 The Abbey Garden	1
Contractors	Palace, Norman Shaw North; 7 Millbank; 1 Parliament Street	119
Total Staff		916

(Source: Accommodation Review Phase 1 Report. Updated February 2006)

Police and Security

35. There are more than 470 officers maintaining the security of the Estate. 650m² (36%) of the area allocated to the police is administrative office, control centre and training space, chiefly in 1 Canon Row. The remaining 1,265m² comprises access points, lockers, changing rooms, kitchens and mess rooms, predominantly in basement areas not usable as office space. Increases in Police numbers to respond to rising security threats are putting considerable pressure on Police accommodation.

Press

36. Parliamentary correspondents from national and local news organisations are based in the Press Gallery areas on three floors behind the Chamber. 850m² (58%) of the space is densely occupied office accommodation, the remaining 610m² being ancillary areas such as the bar, library, dining and function rooms. The refurbishment of the Press Gallery area is currently underway. The temporary Times hut is being removed, and the office areas are being re-planned in line with health and safety compliance. As a result the number of desks will reduce from 174 to 152.

Services

37. Post Office (43 staff), Travel Office (7 staff), and Telephone Switchboard (29 staff in windowless space).

Amenities and Clubs

38. Florist, Hairdresser, Rifle Club, Sports and Social Club, Westminster Gym.

Contractors

39. Maintenance, services and cleaning. Almost all of the accommodation occupied by contractors is in basement or windowless areas with few other obvious usages.

6. ESTATES STRATEGY

Strategic Plan

40. In July 2005 the House of Commons Commission agreed a Strategic Plan for the period 2006–11. The Plan identified accommodation and works as a priority area and noted that:

41. *“Space on the Parliamentary estate is at a premium. During the planning period it will be necessary to take a strategic look at how space is used to ensure a good alignment with the delivery of primary objectives. It will also be necessary to develop a long-term investment strategy that will provide accommodation that is fit for purpose and is maintained to an appropriate standard.”*

42. The 2006 House of Commons Corporate Business Plan provides further detail on how this priority area will be tackled: improving poor quality space to agreed minimum standards, instituting longer-term planning and making optimal use of existing space. As the Business Plan makes clear, existing financial plans do not include provision for a further significant expansion of the Parliamentary Estate either for additional office accommodation or for new services such as the proposed Visitor Centre for which the House has indicated approval in principle.

43. A 25 year Estates Strategy is in early development by the Parliamentary Estates Director, and is awaiting the outcome of the Administration Committee’s Report to be further developed. The Estates Strategy is based on the assumption that the projected growth in Parliamentary activity will be accommodated within the existing Estate. It will look at ways to upgrade and improve existing accommodation. A number of tentative possibilities for reorganisation are being prepared.

Decant Requirement

44. The House is currently leasing 1,800m² of office accommodation on two floors of 4 Millbank, providing about 200 temporary desk positions to enable major works planned across the Estate over the next 3–5 years requiring significant moves of occupants of all categories.

45. There is an ongoing requirement to ring-fence such temporary or “decant” accommodation, to enable maintenance, temporary projects, and reorganisation of the occupancy of the Estate. The approved recommendation from the 2003 Accommodation Review is 5% of the total office accommodation, which equates to 1,800m², equivalent to approximately two floors of 7 Millbank.

Furnishing and Technology Standards

46. Standards are laid down for the provision of facilities within accommodation on the Estate in order to support the activities of Members and staff appropriately.

47. Members are each currently provided four telephone lines for voice and fax services. Staff of the house are allocated their own telephone line where necessary. Each workstation is provided with access to the Parliamentary network.

48. Furnishing Standards for Members' offices were provided in 2003. A copy has been made available to the Administration Committee. The standards seek to provide guidance to staff on the levels of service which are to be provided and ensure equality and transparency of allocation. They maintain a consistency of furniture style which is appropriate to the Palace and its various outbuildings. A corresponding set of furnishing standards for staff of the House is planned.

16 March 2006

Further memorandum from the Serjeant at Arms

1. Since Roger Sands, the Clerk of the House and Chief Executive, gave his evidence on this to your committee on 9 May we have had a request from two of the major parties to increase their presence on the Parliamentary Estate.

2. In the first instance the Liberal Democrats have asked for additional space in 2 The Abbey Garden for their Policy and Research Unit. Although there is currently a spare room I have resisted allocating it to the Liberal Democrats because this is the only room on that part of the Estate at the present time that could be used as decant accommodation in extremis were an existing office rendered unusable. Moreover I was wary of allocating existing rooms for a new usage at a time when your committee is in the middle of its review I have also had an approach from the Official Opposition asking for additional staff team leaders of various policy development work working for Members of the Shadow Cabinet, to be housed in accommodation currently allocated to the Official Opposition in both Norman Shaw South and the Palace of Westminster. On current plans I understand that there will be an additional eight members of staff working for the Shadow Cabinet. In the course of his oral evidence the Clerk of the House alluded to the lack of clarity surrounding the allocation of House accommodation for what could be considered to be party political activities. Without going into detail, the following might fall into that category:

- The “parliamentary resources units” of the three main parties.
- The significantly increased number of staff now supporting the Leader of the Official Opposition.
- The Official Opposition proposal to accommodate the additional policy staff to whom I have already referred.
- The occupation of four ministerial offices in the Colonnade such as the room occupied by the Minister without Portfolio and Party Chair.

3. All the accommodation which is occupied in this way of course reduces the accommodation available for use by individual Members and their staff. I strongly support the Clerk in his suggestion that we would welcome any guidance that your committee might be able to give on this issue when it comes to make its recommendation.

4. Following the evidence sessions with the Clerk of the House, Paul Monaghan, Greg Unwin and myself you asked for further information for the Committee. I attach a short paper on the practicality of suiting Members Accommodation which amplifies Paul Monaghan's evidence. I also provide the details of residences and other overnight accommodation which you require.

18 May 2006

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2. I hope this information is sufficient.

26 May 2006

Annex 1

SUITING OF MEMBERS' ACCOMMODATION

1. On 25 April Paul Monaghan, the Director of Estates, gave evidence to the Committee concerning the suiting of offices on the Parliamentary Estate. In his evidence Mr Monaghan stated that it would be possible to address the requirement to provide each member with a suited office within the Estate Strategy if this was decided upon. He then referred to the need to move people around and for difficult decisions to be taken if this was to be achieved. Given the way the evidence session flowed, he did not have the opportunity to expand on the practical issues which would need to be addressed. In summary these are:

- Given the cellular nature of the office accommodation in the Palace and the Grade 1 listing of the building there are very few opportunities for making structural changes which would allow an increase in the number of rooms available. This means that rooms could be suited only by reducing, very significantly, the number of Members who had offices in the building. As an example, an initial outline proposal for providing suites in the Upper Committee Corridors would have resulted in a reduction from 80 single Member offices to 36 suites and 7 single Member offices.
- No work has been done to quantify the effect of suiting other Members' offices in the Palace but the scale is likely to be much the same.
- Similar arguments apply to suiting more accommodation in 1 Parliament Street and the Norman Shaw buildings.
- There is currently no space available into which staff of the House could be moved to provide additional accommodation for Members. It may, however, be possible identify opportunities to make improvements at the margin by exchanging accommodation between staff and Members. No work has been done in this area to date.
- No funds are currently provided in the financial plans agreed by the Commission to obtain any additional accommodation or to carry out the works required to achieve further suiting if this is desired.

2. Given these constraints it is not possible to provide suited accommodation for all Members within the current estate. To achieve suited accommodation as a strategic aim it would require the House to take on additional accommodation either in the Westminster area or elsewhere. There are significant operational and cost implications which would have to be understood and accepted before such a decision was taken.

3. A further consideration is that moving the staff that currently share their Member's accommodation, in order to achieve suiting, would require more space to be found for them; this would result in a very inefficient use of the space in those Members' offices.

Annex 2

RESIDENTIAL AND OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATION

PROVISION

1. Residential accommodation is provided within the Parliamentary Estate as follows:

<i>Location</i>	<i>Occupant</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Upkeep</i>
2, Parliament Street	Serjeant at Arms	399 sq m	£2.2m	£1.3k
3, Parliament Street	Clerk of the House	405 sq m	£2.8m	£1.3k
2A Canon Row	Head Office Keeper	159 sq m	£809k	£1.1k
2B Canon Row	2nd Office Keeper	131 sq m	£666k	£1.1k
4 Canon Row	Speaker's Secretary	245 sq m	£1.6m	£1.1k
Speaker's House 1st floor: Speaker's Housekeeper's flat Palace of Westminster		48.1 sq m	N/A	£1k

2. Residential accommodation is also provided in Rochester Row:

102 Rochester Row	3rd Office Keeper	91 sq m	£375k	£7k
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See footnotes ^{2, 3, 4}

REQUIREMENT

3. The Speaker occupies his flat to enable him to conduct his official duties. The Clerk of the House, the Serjeant at Arms, and the Speaker's Secretary occupy their residences in order to attend upon the Speaker whenever he requires this. It is desirable to have senior officials on site to react to and if necessary direct any emergency, especially in the area of security.

4. The Head, Second and Third Office Keepers are staff of the House who provide 24 hour on site cover every day throughout the year to deal with any emergency requirements which Members or others may have. Typical calls are reacting on the death of a Member, retrieving and forwarding papers and other items for Members and ensuring that Members' interests are safeguarded in the event of disruption to their offices

² Market valuations carried out March 2006 by the Valuation Office Agency.

³ Upkeep values shown are for council tax only. Utilities are not separately metered and occupants make a contribution from salaries to cover the notional cost. Figures for other maintenance activities are not recorded separately from those in other areas of the Palace and outbuildings.

⁴ Upkeep for 102 Rochester Row covers utilities and service charge (which includes an element for maintenance).

such as water ingress or fire. Were this accommodation not available then equivalent alternative residential space would have to be provided for the Head and Second Office Keepers in the vicinity of the Palace. The Third Office Keeper has a flat in Rochester Row.

5. Residence in this accommodation is a requirement under the terms and conditions of the individuals involved.

BACKGROUND

6. The use of the accommodation currently occupied by the residences in Parliament Street and Canon Row was considered by the then Services Committee as part of its report into the first phase of the new Parliamentary building.⁵ Based on evidence from Sir Hugh Casson and PSA, which indicated that the buildings were “. . . frail and vulnerable, giving rise to loading problems, even in standard office use . . .” the Committee supported the conversion of these properties into residences. The major factor in support of the decision was the character and layout of the Grade II listed buildings which argued for the restoration of their original use combined with the fact that to convert the properties for office use would be very expensive.

7. A point in favour of the decision was that the Serjeant at Arms, Deputy Serjeant at Arms, two Office Keepers and the Speaker’s Secretary vacated accommodation in the Palace which was converted to provide convenient offices near the Chamber for Members and their support staff.

8. During the refurbishment of Norman Shaw South between 2001 and 2003 the area in that building formerly occupied as a residence by the Clerk of the House was given over to Members’ offices. The Clerk of the House occupied the Serjeant at Arms’ residence; the Serjeant at Arms now occupies what was the Deputy’s accommodation. The Deputy Serjeant at Arms no longer has a residence. This change was effected on change of Deputy Serjeant at Arms so no issues arose over terms and conditions.

OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATION

9. As well as the staff quarters in the Speaker’s flat the House provides accommodation for staff who are required to remain late in support of the sittings of the House or its Committees. The bulk of this (17 small bedrooms) is in 21 John Islip Street in a building which was once the Speaker’s chauffeur’s flat.

10. There are also a number of rooms, formed of lower quality space, which double as changing spaces for Deputy Speakers and uniformed staff with duties in the Chamber, in the basement of the Parliament Street complex and the Palace as follows:

Parliament Street			
Basement	5 rooms	64 sq m	Chamber staff
Palace			
Star Chamber Court Principal floor	3 rooms	36.7 sq m	Deputy Speakers
Clock Tower 1st floor	2 rooms	30.7 sq m	Chamber staff
Speaker’s House Principal Mezzanine	2 rooms	32.9 sq m	Speaker’s staff

11. Overnight accommodation at the expense of the House is provided for those who have a clear and proven business need. In practice this means:

- Staff who are expected to be on duty to support the House or its Committees after 10.30 pm and who live outside the 25 mile taxi radius.
- Staff who are on duty until the Rise of the House if this is expected to be after 7.30 pm and who are required for duty before 8.30 am the following morning.
- Exceptionally, on other occasions on which there is a departmental business reason for use of the overnight accommodation, with the approval of the Departmental Establishments Officer.

12. Accommodation is provided at the Union Jack Club in Sandell Street, adjacent to Waterloo Station, from Sunday to Thursday inclusive for 32 sitting weeks per year, for nine Doorkeepers. These staff retain a right to overnight accommodation as part of the terms and conditions under which they were employed. This privilege was removed from the terms and conditions of Doorkeepers who joined after 1995.

⁵ Third Report from the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), HC (1990-91) 551, paragraphs 14–17.

Memorandum from HOK International Ltd

CLARIFICATION OF THE BREAKDOWN OF THE 5,800M² OF MEMBERS' STAFF AREAS

1. The 5,800m² is space allocated to Members' staff only. It accommodates 629 of the 1,230 staff desks (the other 601 desks being located in Members' rooms). It consists of: adjoining staff rooms forming part of Members' suites, "pooled" and other staff rooms managed by the Serjeant at arms Accommodation Office (such as Lower Secretaries), and some "special" areas in the Palace.

2. This detailed breakdown is as follows:

2,483m² of staff rooms forming part of Members' suites, (311 desks). 2,333m² of this is in Portcullis House. These rooms are de facto controlled by the Whips since they are allocated associated with the adjoining Members' rooms.

2,595m² of staff rooms managed by the Serjeant at Arms Accommodation Office (245 desks). Distributed across all Members' buildings except Portcullis House.

714m² of "special" or "official" rooms, almost all in the Palace (73 desks). Includes the Cloisters and some accommodation for the staff of the Whips and others working for the parties.

Note: The number of desks reported in the breakdown is based on the desk count carried out to inform the report submitted to the Committee on 16 March 2006 which is considered to be the best data available. However, the detailed use of space and desk numbers fluctuates constantly and an error in the order of $\pm 10\%$ might be expected.

25 May 2006

Memorandum from the Clerk of the House

ANALYSIS OF DESK SPACES FOR HOUSE STAFF LOCATED IN THE PALACE OF WESTMINSTER

1. When I appeared before the Committee on 9 May I undertook to provide further detail on desk spaces for House staff in the Palace of Westminster—summary information had previously been given in the first column of figure 9 of the memorandum submitted by the Serjeant at Arms.⁶

2. The appended table sets out the information organised by department and role. In some cases the totals for departments do not exactly match those in the original table as they reflect changes that have occurred since 31 December, including the creation of PICT. A number of the desk spaces are not in locations that would normally be considered as office accommodation; for example, the Library has one desk in the cellars and the Refreshment Department has several desks within kitchen and stores areas. The total includes a number of staff in the Serjeant at Arms Department who, for historical reasons, are located in areas of the Palace that would normally be regarded as part of the House of Lords.

3. Desk spaces for third party occupants of the estate, including those providing services under contract (eg police & security, telephone switchboard, Post Office), are excluded.

May 2006

⁶ *Accommodation Inquiry: Memorandum from the Serjeant at Arms on behalf of the Board of Management*, 16 March 2006.

ANALYSIS OF DESK SPACES FOR HOUSE STAFF LOCATED IN THE PALACE OF
WESTMINSTER: MAY 2006

<i>Department</i>	<i>Office/Directorate</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Desk spaces/staff</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Office of the Clerk Clerk's Dept	Clerk of the House and Office of the Clerk (OotC)	Clerk of the House's office on the Principal Floor plus former SAA stores (SA1/2) on the Colonnade.	7 Clerk of the House, Private Secretary, Secretary to the Board of Management and 4 other staff.	Proximity of the Clerk of the House to the Chamber is essential: the Clerk is frequently required to be in the Chamber and to provide advice to the Chair at short notice. Staff of the OotC work in close support of the Clerk in his role as Chief Executive. Close proximity to the Clerk of these staff was recommended in Braithwaite Review—other OotC staff are based in 7 Millbank.
Clerk's	Clerk Assistant	Principal Floor	1	Proximity to the Chamber essential to provide front-line on-call support to the Table of the House
Clerk's	Public and Private Bill Office	Third floor	11 8 Clerks 1 Senior Executive Officer 2 support staff	Proximity to the Chamber and ready availability to Members is essential: among other duties, staff in the office provide advice to the Chair and Table of the House on matters concerning legislation and advise on and accept amendments from Members and deal with Private Members' Bills. The office is staffed each day until the rising of the House: it provides division clerks and oversees the conduct and reporting of divisions. The Private Bill Office was merged with the Public Bill Office in 2003, and in discharging its Private Bill functions it is required by standing orders to be open to the public on fixed times on certain days. It also supports the Committee of Selection.
Clerk's	Foreign Affairs & Defence Committees	Main Committee Office (two open plan offices)	15 4 Clerks and 11 other staff	Required to retain classified documents in secure circumstances and to transport them a minimum distance to committee meetings. Members need to visit office to read these.
Clerk's	Commission, Finance & Services Committee, Administration Committee.	Main Committee Corridor (North Wing)	6 3 Clerks and 3 support staff	Required to support Speaker as Chairman of Commission and individual Commissioners, including Leader of the House, and to be readily accessible to Chairmen and members of Finance & Services and Administration Committees, involved in day to day running of the House and services for Members: frequent contact with Clerk as Chairman of Board of Management, members of Board and other senior House- based officers.
Clerk's	Committee Office (other than Foreign Affairs, Defence and Standards & Privileges Committees)	Main Committee Office and Principal Floor	8 2 Principal Clerks and 6 support staff	Proximity to Chamber essential for Clerk of Committees to provide front-line on-call support to the Table of the House. Main Committee Office provides essential on-site support to select committees and Committee of Selection. Provides committee office services on all sitting days until rising of the House. Provides division clerks on call at all times when the House is sitting (most of whom at other times based in 7 Millbank). Includes Clerk of JCOS

<i>Department</i>	<i>Office/Directorate</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Desk spaces/staff</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Clerk's	Standards and Privileges Committee	3rd Floor	2 1 Clerk and 1 support staff	who is required to retain sensitive and classified documents in secure circumstances. Required to retain sensitive documents in secure location. Needs to be available to Members for consultation on complaints and progress of investigations, and to support Journal Office, particularly in relation to questions of privilege.
Clerk's	Journal Office	3rd Floor	9 5 Clerks and 4 support staff	Provides support to the Chair and the Clerks at the Table on questions of procedure at all times when the House is sitting, and is available to all Members for such advice during sitting hours and beyond. Needs to be accessible to Members seeking advice on orderliness of and procedures for presenting petitions. Needs to be accessible to Members seeking advice on issues of privilege. Is required to be open for laying of papers by government departments and others. Production of daily records of all decisions of the House requires proximity to the Chamber. Provides division clerks. Provides staff for the Procedure Committee and second Clerk for the Standards and Privileges Committee.
Clerk's	Table Office	Principal Floor and 3rd Floor	12 6 Clerks and 6 support staff	Proximity to the Chamber is essential. The Principal Clerk provides front-line on-call support to the Table of the House at all times when it is sitting. The office deals with Questions, EDMs applications for adjournment debates, and many aspects of the business of the House and Westminster Hall. Members visit it throughout the day, and it remains open to the rising of the House. It compiles the Order of Business for the next day, which is always available for inspection by Members. The Office also gives immediate support to the Chair and the Clerks at the Table, and provides division clerks.
Clerk's	Vote Office	Lower ground Floor accommodation + two offices on ground floor beneath the Chamber + Lobby Office in Member's Lobby	13.5 Deliverer of the Vote and Parliamentary Deputy 11.5 other members of staff, including 1 part time secretary and 3 early morning run staff.	Receipt, distribution and availability for Members, of papers and documents essential for the business of the House. Deliverer and his Parliamentary Deputy need to be in close proximity to the Chamber to give advice and briefing to the Chair and the Table. The Office is open from 7.00 am until the rise of the House or later and on Saturday mornings.
Clerk's	Broadcasting	Clocktower	2 Director of Broadcasting and personal assistant	The Director of Broadcasting can view (live) coverage of every meeting which is being televised, and the bespoke monitoring system was recently updated. She is also within easy reach of all committee rooms should her presence be needed, and on hand to both the Speaker and to the Clerk of the Parliaments, to whom she is answerable.
Clerk's	Overseas Office	Main Committee Office	3 Clerk and 2 support staff	The Palace location for the Overseas Office supports its representational role: welcoming Speakers and other parliamentary visitors, and escorting them to the

<i>Department</i>	<i>Office/Directorate</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Desk spaces/staff</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
				Chamber galleries, Committee meetings and other engagements in the Palace.
Finance & Administration	OHSWS. (Occupational Health, Safety & Welfare Service)	Off Lower Waiting Hall	2 Medical nursing staff	Medical consultation rooms in close proximity to both Chambers. Convenient location with easy access for Members of both Houses both for emergency use and pre-booked appointments.
Library	Librarian	Principal Floor	1	Palace location is essential for accessibility by Members and Library staff on this floor
Library	Reference Services Section—Oriel Room	Members' Library	5 1 Library Clerk A2 4 Band B2/C or D2	Focal point for enquiries by Members in person. Includes Book & Video service loans. The room is staffed each day until the rise of the House on a rotation basis.
Library	Reference Services Section—Reference Room	Members' Library	6 1 Band B1 1 Band B2 2 Band C 2 Band D1	Main collection of reference stock located here where staff deal with face-to-face and telephone enquiries from Members. The room is staffed each day until the rise of the House on a rotation basis
Library	Reference Services Section—"A" Room	Members' Library	4 1 Head of Section 1 Band B2 1 Band C/D1 1 Band D1	Support for front line staff in the Oriel Room; Reference Room & Video & Loans desk providing immediate availability of information and material for Members.
Library	International Affairs & Defence Section—"A" Room	Members' Library	1 1 member of section on a rota basis	Main enquiry point for Members with face-to-face enquiries on matters of international affairs and defence.
Library	Library Resources	Cellars	1 1 D2	Maintains and oversees newspaper and periodical stores; provides support & takes requests from Members' Library and Reference Room to assist enquiries from Members and ensure they get a speedy response.
Library	Reference Services Section	Room 1, Speaker's Flat	5 5 staff ranging from D1 to A2	Proximity to Members' Library stock & resources is essential for close support and operation of non-enquiry related duties. Staff here answer enquiries and support those dealing with front line desk duties in the Members' Library.
Library	Reference Services Section & Librarian's PA	Room 5, Speaker's Flat	4 1 Band B2 2 Band D2 1 hotdesk used by Oriel Room staff	Librarian's PA. Proximity to Librarian essential. Newspaper indexers' operation, which directly supports staff in Members' Library.
Library	International Affairs & Defence Section	Room 5, Speaker's Flat (IADS Annexe)	1 Staffed on a rota basis, grading varies	Support for Members' Library main IADS operation in A Room
Library	Office Services	Room 7, Speaker's Flat	1 1 Band D2	Office support all Library staff in the Palace for mail, copying, filing and general duties.
PICT	Official Report support	North Bridge	3	Fast response support provided to Hansard editorial staff throughout the day and night.
Official Report	Editor	Room 35, off Lower Ministerial Corridor	1	Head of Department; proximity to sub-editors' room and Members, in the event of queries/problems, is essential.
Official Report	Deputy Editor (House)	Off Lower Ministerial Corridor	1	Manager of all editorial staff reporting Chamber proceedings. Required to be available to Members in event of queries/

<i>Department</i>	<i>Office/Directorate</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Desk spaces/staff</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
				problems on daily part and to ensure adequate staffing to cover sitting hours.
Official Report	Sub-editors	Mezzanine Floor, off Ladies Gallery stairs	8	Staff sub-edit reports of Chamber proceedings to tight deadlines and require speedy access to Chamber and to be available to Members checking speeches.
Official Report	Reporters	Hansard reporters room off Ladies Gallery stairs	18 16 reporters plus 2 technical support	Staff produce the report of Chamber proceedings and require approx. hourly access to the Press Gallery to take notes. Tight production deadlines necessitate close proximity to Chamber.
Official Report	Administration	Side offices off Hansard reporters room	6	Staff support work of reporters and editors; inward receipt and processing of written answers and statements from Government Departments. Require prompt access to Chamber.
Official Report	Committee Sub-Editors	North Bridge	3	Staff sub-edit reports of Westminster Hall proceedings. Require close proximity to Westminster Hall for regular access and to be available for Members wishing to read speeches and raise queries.
Official Report	House typing	North Bridge	4	Staff take dictation from Reporters working on Chamber proceedings. Must be close to Reporters to ensure tight deadlines are met.
Official Report	Hansard Reporters (Westminster Hall)	South Turret	8	*Staff report Westminster Hall proceedings. They work to tight deadlines in a rota and must have speedy access to Westminster Hall to take notes.
Official Report	Hansard Reporters (Westminster Hall)	South Bridge	6	*See above
Official Report	Committee administrative staff	South Bridge	2	Staff require frequent and speedy access to Committee rooms to collect log and notes, scan them to 7 Millbank and then return notes to Members. They liaise with Westminster Sound when emergencies arise.
Refreshment	Director of Catering	RD office suite Adjacent to Lady Members' Room	3 Director of Catering, 2 support staff	Location is central to the majority of the Department's operations.
Refreshment	Operations Manager	RD office suite Next to Director of Catering	2 Operations Manager, Retail Manager	Proximity to operations for which managers are responsible.
Refreshment	Human Resources	RD Office suite Opposite Director of Catering	4 Human Resources and Development Manager, 2 support staff, Training Manager	Central point for the department for staff who have any queries.
Refreshment	Cashier	RD Office Suite Opposite Lady Members' room	1 Cashier	Central location allowing MP's and other customers to settle accounts.
Refreshment	Assistant Managers	Adjacent to Photo machine	2 Restaurant and Bars Manager, Catering Manager	Small windowless office that is close to services.

<i>Department</i>	<i>Office/Directorate</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Desk spaces/staff</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Refreshment	Banqueting	RD Office Suite	4 Banqueting Manager, 3 Banqueting Coordinators	Accessible to function rooms, organisers visiting office and the requirement for staff to be on hand for special requirements.
Refreshment	Computer Room (hot desking)	RD Office Suite	3 3 terminals (for staff hot desking)	Facility for staff to order stores, stock take reconciliation electronically on line and process written material
Refreshment	Head Chef's Office	Kitchen corridor	3 Head Chef, Senior Sous Chef, Kitchen Coordinator	Within the kitchen and stores area.
Refreshment	Executive Chef	Kitchen Corridor	1 Executive Chef	Within the kitchen and stores area.
Refreshment	Purchasing	Kitchen corridor	3 Purchasing manager, Coordinator, Stores Supervisor	Close to goods receiving and stores in the basement.
Refreshment	Food and Beverage Control	Kitchen corridor	3 F&B Control Manager, 2 Control Clerks	Financial control of food and beverage purchases from the delivery bay.
Refreshment	Kitchen corridor meeting room/ computer room/staff- union room	Kitchen corridor	1 Meeting room and "hot desking" facility	Area for staff without designated computers to work and meet. It also allows the area to be used by the unions on facility time.
Refreshment	Delivery Bay	Kitchen corridor	1 Goods Receiver	Adjacent to the delivery of all food stuffs.
Refreshment	Terrace Cafeteria	Terrace	1 Supervisor	Cupboard like space within the Terrace Cafeteria
Refreshment	Banqueting Floor	Banqueting corridor	1 1 Floor Manager	Small room close to the operation allowing Supervisors to reconcile business information from events, such as billing, staffing etc.
Serjeant-at-Arms	Serjeant at Arms office	Upper Cloister	10 4 SAA/Deputy/ Assistant SAA, 1 SAA Personal Staff Officer, 1 Internal Communications Manager, 1 Office Manager, 3 Support staff	Proximity of the Serjeant, his Deputy and Assistants to the Chamber is essential: they are required to be in the Chamber at short notice in the event of an emergency or any irregularity. The Serjeant is required to provide immediate advice to the Speaker, and other occupants of the Chair. Staff support the Serjeants and assist Members frequently, often face to face.
Serjeant-at-Arms	Chambers and Committees	Off Members' Lobby and below Members' Staircase	3 1 Principal Doorkeeper 2 Deputy principal Doorkeepers	Oversee smooth running of the Chamber and manage Doorkeepers on duty in the vicinity of the Chamber and in Committees.
Serjeant-at-Arms	Office and Accommodation Services	Admission Order Office, Principal Floor	2 2 Office Clerks	Manage access to the Galleries
Serjeant-at-Arms	Office and Accommodation Services	Service Centre, (HoL)	7 3 Senior Office Keepers 4 Office Keepers	Manage and supervise Attendant Staff providing services in Committee Rooms, Members' offices and reception desks.
Serjeant-at-Arms	Office and Accommodation Services	Turret off Westminster Hall	3 3 Cleaning Managers	Manage and supervise directly employed cleaning staff across the House of Commons Estate.

<i>Department</i>	<i>Office/Directorate</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Desk spaces/staff</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Serjeant-at-Arms	Office and Accommodation Services	Colonnade	4 4 Events Administrators	Situated in the Palace in order to provide convenient face to face advice to Members and Members staff organising events in the Palace and Portcullis House. They arrange filming permits and monitor film crews to ensure that they keep within the regulations. They work with Members and their staff to support VIP visits.
Serjeant-at-Arms	Pass Administration	Black Rod's Garden Entrance Pass Office (HoL)	5 5 Office Clerks	Manage and issue photo identity passes for the House of Lords.
Serjeant-at-Arms	Maintenance Management	Boiler House Court area	21 1 Maintenance Service Manager 3 Shift Engineers 17 Technical Officers and clerical support.	Manage Maintenance staff and contractors delivering services in Palace Effective decision making in the frequent event of breakdowns and maintenance problems require these staff to be on site.
Serjeant-at-Arms	Maintenance Operations	Boiler House Court area	4 1 Service Manager 3 Help desk staff	Tightly integrated with maintenance staff. Help desk cover in silent hours is provided by co-located shift engineering staff.
Serjeant-at-Arms	Maintenance Operations	Cockles Corridor Area (HoL)	4 4 Managers of craft staff	Effective line management of craft maintenance staff requires their staff to be on site.
Serjeant-at-Arms	Serjeant-at-Arms Finance Unit	Room off No 1 staircase, First Floor	6 1 SAA Head of Finance 1 SAA Procurement Manager 2 SAA Finance/Contracts Managers 2 SAA Procurement Officers	Located near the Serjeant at Arms to provide immediate financial decision making and budget management advice.