

Point 3 – Generic

Comment - 20 January 2011 17:32 - I want to complain about the frankly stupid pricing on some items now in the cafes. We were told that it is in line with the outlets in the area but it seems to me that you must have been drunk when setting many of the prices and had not bothered to even look at prices in the area. Please could you tell me where you saw Lucozade for £1.40 a bottle?

It was 80p so you have put in a price rise of 75%. Even the corner shop around the corner does not charge that much. Honestly it is totally taking the mick. I can only assume you intend to rise prices so much that custom drops and you can employ less staff to meet savings. It really is shocking.

Response - Thank you for your feedback. I am sorry you do not understand or appreciate our pricing policy.

In the case of Lucozade the price rise increase was great. This was unfortunate but we are tasked to bring our prices in line with similar operations. Supermarkets and corner shops are not benchmarked as their prices will be lower due to the volumes they are able to purchase and not being liable for VAT. We do not want to discourage our customers using our venues, quite the contrary, we instead have to tow a fine line between increases revenues and offering a venue that our customers will use. There may come a time that certain products will not be sold due their price and lack of popularity and therefore customers will have the opportunity to choose from a section of other drinks which are seen as better value for money.

Comment - 27 January 2011 12:00 - It is really hard to get replies to phone calls when trying to make reservations resulting in my having to keep the issue pending for several hours sometimes - not to mention the difficulty of remembering that the issue hasn't been resolved. It makes a simple task very time consuming. Could there be a central number that is manned all day and takes reservations for all the restaurants? please!

Response - Many thanks for taking the time to leave feedback regarding the problems you faced when contacting the Dining rooms.

Firstly may I apologise that you experienced this problem in the first place, I am aware that at times it can be hard when trying to get through to the Dining rooms. We are currently in the position of reviewing how to handle the reservation lines for all the dining rooms on the estate. At present the lines are manned between the hours of 10am-10pm Monday to Thursday, and 10am – 4.30pm on a Friday. We do not have resource for a designated receptionist as you would have in many restaurants and therefore the lines are answered by the waiting staff.

As you can imagine at times staff are dealing with customers face to face and are unable to answer the telephone. During the hours of 3pm-6pm we do hold the reservations diaries centrally and I hope that during these hours you have not had a problem in getting through. Once again I apologise for the inconvenience that this issue has caused, please rest assured that we are looking into ways of making the process of contacting the dining rooms easier for all concerned.

Comment - 01 February 2011 09:42 - I appreciate that there isn't much of a call for this but, I'm Muslim and so are a number of other people but I was wondering if you could accommodate our food selection a bit more by providing a more consumable menu 'for us'. By putting some halal foods on the list. I understand that halal meats must be more difficult for you to get a hold of but I'm sure, 'if there's a will, there's a way! Anyway, if this request is out of the question, please excuse this message, and I bid you a good day! :-)

P.S I would like this for all the restaurants and not a specific one as this form may suggest at the bottom, by the sender selecting a specific venue.

Response - 04/02/2011 14:17 - It is not in our remit to provide our dishes with halal meat and poultry alternatives and indeed we've not had this request before. Catering & Retail Services are unable to make the decision to use halal produce. However, if it is something you feel very strongly

about and would like to make a formal request, I'd suggest you contact the Clerk of the Administration Committee who will process your enquiry.

Comment - 08 December 2010 16:48 - I am a manager of a company called [REMOVED], would it be possible to have the name of the contact in regards to providing sandwiches and salads on a daily basis? I would be more than happy to arrange a sample platter if required.

Response - 14/02/2011 11:18 - Unfortunately you have missed the opportunity to tender for this business as the procurement process started in December 2010 and we are now already midway through it.

According to my records I have already previously emailed you twice; firstly on the 14th December 2010 with an email including links to our e-tendering portal and then again on the 17th December 2010 when I gave you more detailed background information on the nature of our requirement explaining that we would shortly be going out to tender; you responded on both occasions stating that one of your colleagues, a [removed] would be in touch. I have no record of your colleague making contact with me, but in any case, had you registered on the e-tendering portal as advised you would have been given the opportunity to submit a bid for this business, unfortunately this opportunity has now passed. We will not be re-tendering for the provision of sandwiches and salads until Spring 2015 at the earliest, but I would again advise that you register with the portal to safeguard your inclusion next time around.

Thank you for expressing interest in becoming a supplier to the House of Commons. The House of Commons is now using an e-tendering Portal to administer its tenders and therefore we would like to invite you to register on the Portal. Registration is free and will allow you to express interest in tenders and download tender documents. Once you have registered, you will need to check the Portal on a regular basis to check for tendering opportunities that may interest you. Please note that registering does not mean you are a supplier to Parliament.

The following link will take you to one of the Commercial Services Directorate's internet pages: Commercial Services Directorate: Ongoing tenders Here you will find a link to the e-tendering Portal, and some guidance to assist you in registering and using the Portal.

Should you have any problems registering on the Portal, or any questions on how to use it, please contact the In-Tend Support team at support@in-tend.com or call them on +44 (0)1332 869400. Any questions relating to tenders or associated documents should be directed to the House of Commons Transaction Team at transactions@parliament.uk or to one of the following telephone numbers +44 (0)20 7219 2259, +44(0)20 7219 3947

Comment - 13 February 2011 05:07 - I think it would be really useful if on the pages outlining all the different catering facilities, the actual location of the respective venues was mentioned. Unless I'm missing something, those details appear to be often lacking. For new staff members, it isn't obvious where things are, lovely as they sound!!

Response - 17/02/2011 14:23 - Thank you for your interesting feedback regarding the lack of location description on our WebPages. This is a very good point! As my role is [REMOVED], I think that putting a brief description about location under each venue is a very good idea and will be something for my colleagues and myself to consider in the near future. Thank you again for this suggestion.

Comment - 06 January 2011 12:32 - Whilst you stock a variety of fairtrade products, why aren't fairtrade bananas included in the products on offer in the parliamentary estate?

Response - Sorry for delay in response. Our Purchasing Manager has replied as follows: Fairtrade bananas have become synonymous with the Fairtrade brand and as consumers we all rightly

demand and expect that our bananas should come from ethical sources that support farmers and farming communities worldwide; however outside of the larger supermarket chains, the purchasing of Fairtrade bananas has proven to be extremely difficult.

It might sound like a very simple premise and perceived as a quick-win as far as Fairtrade is concerned, but we have never had any success in procuring consistent and good quality Fairtrade bananas.

The problem lies in the fact that supermarkets work with farms and farming cooperatives around the world to secure entire crops of bananas from the likes of Del Monte, Chiquita, Dole Foods, Fyffes Bananas, and Noboa/Bonita who among them make up the majority of global banana supplies; what then arrives onto the local wholesale markets such as Covent Garden and Spitalfields tend to be inferior quality, small and green but costing on average 10-15% more than the standard varieties. We have run trials on-and-off since at least 2005 and most recently again last February when we brought them back for FT fortnight; unfortunately on each occasion, trials have been deemed unsuccessful due to these ongoing issues of availability, quality and ripeness and taking last February as an example we were forced to return 12 consignments (150kgs) over the ten days because of issues with quality (either under-ripe or overripe fruit) and discarded over 30kg as spoilage for the same reasons. Although many people may argue this point, it is widely publicised and acknowledged that Fairtrade is not and never will be a quality standard mark for product; it is a quality of life standard for the growers and pickers and therefore concerns over consistency and quality will simply go unaddressed as the Fairtrade foundation has no governance or indeed care over the quality of product – an article in the Grocer magazine last year commented that the upshot of this is that customers are often attracted towards the ethical choice, but repelled by the inconsistency of the product which we have certainly found to be the case with us.

There is also a point to be made about cost, although this is not so much an issue as it has been in the past; going back to 2005, the cost of FT bananas was about 40% higher than standard, however according to a report in the Times, prices of FT bananas dropped dramatically in 2007 (by around 20%) when Sainsbury's and Waitrose caused the market to double* when they invested heavily into Fairtrade bananas and converted completely over to ethical supply – as mentioned above this awesome influence on the market has caused a shortfall of availability of quality Fairtrade bananas to wholesalers; so while supermarket consumers are able to make the ethical choice and buy good quality, value for money product our customers will potentially find themselves paying around 15% more for what in all likelihood will be an inferior product. *To give an indication of the scales involved here, last year Sainsbury's purchased 162,000,000 kgs against the House of Commons' 18,000kgs. I hope this information is useful and apologies for not getting back to you sooner.

Comment - 17 March 2011 13:34 - I was wondering how if it might be possible to influence the menus on offer in the restaurants on the estate during the second week of October this year. The reason I am asking is because the 16th will be World Food Day and I was thinking it would be great if it might be possible to have say one dish a day in the week prior that could represent cuisine in various parts of the developing world. I am sure I could ask a few friends at various NGOs to get onto some celebrity chefs to design specific recipes for you as well using appropriate ingredients that are also widely available. My interest in doing this is just to promote the UN day and I would not be looking for any sort of advertising or acknowledgement similar to that of Fairtrade Fortnight other than the food itself.

Response - 17 March 2011 18:11 - We would certainly look into the possibility of being able to tie into this promotion.

So I can consider if this is possible please can you give me some idea of the participating countries that you have in mind. This will enable us to examine the types of dishes and cost in relation to our prices and products available through our existing suppliers.

I appreciate your assistance with menus from celebs though I have enough of these in my brigade (apparently). I therefore look forward to hearing from you.

Further comment - 22/03/2011 19:55 - Thanks for your email. I think what might be best, as long as you didn't need a response in the next week, would be for me to go away and think over the countries and a couple of recipes each which might work as there are so many potential options at the moment but it might be nice to link them to success stories – such as where a lot of progress has been made on Millennium Development Goal 1 – to halve the number of hungry people by 2015 – which would take a couple of hours to look at. So if it was ok could I come back to you at the end of next week with a bit more detail? Thanks again for coming back to me so quickly on this though.

Comment - Can I ask why in Bellamys there is always a display of dishes near the entrance? It has struck me for some time that this is a terrible waste of food – i.e. there is sometimes a whole fish on display or as was the case on Thursday, an enormous pie (as I left I noticed this had disappeared - was it being served up or thrown away?)

Response - 06/04/2011 15:13 - Further to your feedback left on our webpages last week, Chef, says: "We have display plates in several of our cafeterias, usually close to where our customers enter the venue and use them to show our customers what is on the menu that day. We have found that our customers like to see the actual dishes beforehand this helps to make an informed decision on what to eat at the time of their visit before they arrive at the counter. Display plates can be useful especially if the venues are busy and there are queues at the counter, and it is difficult to return to the beginning of the counter after seeing what is available furthermore it is an educational tool for our younger chefs to improve their composition and menu training leading to presentation skills being heightened and furthermore customer satisfaction. There is a small amount of waste in comparison to what we sell and the service display dishes have been well received by our customers." I hope this clarifies our actions.

Comment - 13 May 2011 14:13 - I got stopped last Thursday evening (5th May) going out on to the terrace. I'm grade B1 and was sure I was allowed out there, but the police officer at the station outside the terrace cafeteria stopped me and said only Members were allowed. I queried that as I was sure I was allowed out, but I was told not unless it was recess. I left it there as I'm not in the habit of arguing with the police! I've since checked on the intranet and I was indeed allowed to go out. It would be great if the officers on duty at such checkpoints were fully familiar with the access rules to avoid the embarrassment and inconvenience caused.

Response - 13 May 2011 15:14 - Thank you for taking the time to send us your feedback regarding access issues to the outside terrace that you encountered had on Thursday 5 May. Unfortunately, access to that area does not come under the jurisdiction of Catering & Retail Services so we can't help you. However, I suggest you contact the Serjeant at Arms who manage security in the House of Commons.

Comment - Can you bring back the pages of comments/suggestions that have been provided by customers? The pages were useful to see if other people had the same complaints/views of catering and also to see if comments had been taken on board by the Department. Without them we have no idea if complaints are being actioned or even being acknowledged.

Response - 01/08/2011 11:26 - Thank you for your feedback and I apologise for not replying sooner but annual leave commitments has resulted in a delay with response. Many apologies. Since the upgrade of our webpages in May 2010, we've not been able to show our customers the feedback we have received, which is a shame. To in some way rectify this, we hope to be setting up a Frequently Asked Questions page on the intranet which will hopefully serve the purpose of informing our customers about some of the issues that are raised. If you should have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Comment - 25 August 2011 16:23 - Sorry to write to you on seemingly such a trivial matter, but I wonder if a no coppers policy has been introduced at HoC catering facilities? For some time I've been getting any change which finishes in 5p given to me in coppers, even if there are 5p pieces in the till. It can be quite frustrating. Today, for the first time, I asked in Bellamy's if I could have a five pence piece, because I am flying this evening and would prefer not to travel with coppers loose in my pocket. The server was quite affronted! And said that if customers give coppers (which I hadn't - I think in general is what she meant) then we should be happy getting coppers back. I wonder, if the HoC would prefer not to get coppers, perhaps a sign could indicate this and embarrassment of getting heckled by staff members in the restaurant could be avoided along with annoyance with getting coppers in change, if this slight irritation is shared by others.

Response - 13 Sep 2011, at 10:46 - Details of your regrettable incident in Bellamy's regarding change in coppers have been passed to be by Director of Catering and Retail Services.

I apologise for the fact that you were treated in such a poor manner and can assure you that this is not a general example of CRS customer service. It is also not our policy to give change in coppers, except when we may be, on the rare occasion, waiting for additional change supplies from the safe. I have asked the Manager of Bellamy's to speak to his team regarding this incident so that it is prevented in the future. Again, my apologies and if I can be of further assistance then please contact me directly.

Comment - 21 July 2011 12:12 - The new vegetarian range is inferior to what was previously on offer. There appears to be minimal variety between outlets, and less interesting menus.

Response - 15/09/2011 15:40 - I am sorry to hear that you are unimpressed with our recent selection of vegetarian offers across our venues.

We have developed this new range after receiving feedback that our offers were a touch boring and did not contain any new ideas and concepts being delivered by high street outlets and major chains. We initially launched our new range of over 20 new dishes on national vegetarian week and to date have received numerous positive feedback from our customers verbally and through the intranet on the choices on offer.

While we endeavour to create a choice and variation we also wish to keep on board diners who regularly choose our vegetarian options therefore I will certainly take on your comments on our offers, furthermore if you would like to add any suggestions we could perhaps consider these when making our selections across our venues.

Further comment - 30/09/2011 14:43 - Perhaps I was slightly harsh. The vegetarian dishes being offered are still of high quality, but I just have the impression there used to be a wider choice. For example there often seems to be an excessive number of tofu dishes across outlets, and sometimes the same dish in more than one outlet on the same day. I appreciate that the administration is under pressure to cut costs so perhaps this is unavoidable.

Anyway, many thanks for taking the time to reply.

Comment - 17 October 2011 12:52 - I had lunch in Portcullis House on Thursday and must admit that I was rather surprised to find that you charged £3.30 for a vegetarian meal made up of fried shredded vegetables and yet charged £2.95 for half a small chicken that came with potatoes! Surely whoever is doing the pricing needs a reality check.

Response - 17/10/2011 17:01 - Thank you very much for taking the time to send us your feedback regarding the price of our Noodle Pattie.

I am sorry to hear of your surprise in our pricing structure. I would like to confirm that the Thai Noodle Pattie contained more expensive produce and quantity of ingredients compared to the Roast Chicken offered last Thursday in Portcullis Cafeteria in 7 Millbank. I know this might sound surprising as we all assume that vegetarian dishes are cheaper than other options but in some cases the cost of

the produce and quantities used in some of our vegetarian dishes is slightly more expensive than meat varieties.

I hope this has been useful, please let me know if you would like a breakdown of the ingredients used in both dishes for future reference or if you would like further clarification on any of the above. May I take this opportunity to thank you for your valued custom and hope to see you again in Portcullis cafeteria in the near future.

Comment - 02 November 2011 12:43 - Could you let me know what the price of the Christmas menus will be - esp in Strangers for lunch.

Response - Thank you for taking the time to get in touch regarding the Christmas menu prices.

The Strangers' Dining Room Christmas meals start from Monday 5 December until Thursday 22 December, and the pricing is pretty much the same as the regular Strangers' Dining Room prices, for example:

First courses

Butternut squash soup with truffle and pumpkin seed cream £4.60

Smoked salmon and all the traditional garnishes £6.90

Main courses

Roast turkey and the trimmings £12.00

Roasted breast of pheasant with pheasant leg 'Shepherd's pie' £16.35

Desserts

All at £5.75

I hope to get the Christmas menu typed next week so can email it to you if you like. The dates for our other Christmas meals are:

6th & 7th December - Bellamy's and the Terrace Cafeteria

13th December - Moncrieff's Self Service

13th & 14th December - Portcullis Cafeteria

14th December - Debate

Cafeteria Christmas lunch prices will be in line with their regular menu.

The Adjournment starts its Festive menu from 5th December until Thursday 22 December and the 6th floor cafe at 7 Millbank starts one week earlier from 28 November until 22 December.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

