

Management Board

Summary Report on the Flood in the Palace of Westminster on 28th July

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 This paper provides the Management Board with a summary of the events surrounding the flood which took place in the House of Lords on Monday 28th July 2008. Substantial damage to the fabric and contents was only averted through the prompt action of staff from both Houses.
- 1.2 The incident did cause approximately £100,000 in repairs which included carpets, ceilings, ICT and telephone, power, heating, cooling systems and annunciators. In addition it was necessary to remove and dry out 2,000 library books, where at least 8 will require conservation. Paid tours of the Visitor Route had to be suspended from the morning of the 28th July to lunchtime on 29th July.

2. Conclusions and Decisions

- 2.1 The Management Board is invited to take note of the cause of the incident, the action taken and the lessons learned.

3. Background

- 3.1 At approximately 1000hrs on the 28th July 2008, Estates were informed of a water leak located in Peers' Lobby and the Law Lords Corridor. Initially the Acting Head of Projects dispatched several personnel to investigate. Within a few minutes it became clear that this was not just a minor water leak but was a major incident which initially closed Parliament to all paying visitors.

4. Causes

- 4.1 The flood was caused when a roof tank full of softened water was drained as part of an upgrading process. A drain valve was opened to allow the water to outflow over an adjoining roof surface. Whilst the discharge was being monitored, the water found a secondary exit through redundant pipework, which led to another separate roof void 50 metres away. It was this secondary outlet which caused the flooding in the Lords area. The considerable distance between the source and the outflow was the reason the problem was not identified straight away.

- 4.2 The water had come from an uncapped 'T' on a 100mm drain pipe from a water tank located in the roof space above Peer's Lobby. The tank drain valve had been opened to empty the tank in preparation of maintenance being carried out. Prior to draining, the pipework was surveyed as reasonably practicable over the previous two days and no other outlets were found. The survey was not conclusive as the pipework disappears into the fabric, voids and crevices of the building.

5. Initial Reaction

- 5.1 Whilst the drain was being closed off, the initial reaction was swift. The Emergency Disaster Team was dispatched along with personnel from departments of both Houses, the fire brigade, Doorkeepers and police. Plastic was laid to catch as much water as possible; water was coming through the ceiling on the ground floor below Peers' Lobby and Law Lords' Corridor, on the Principal floor in Peer's Lobby and Law Lord's Corridor and the Service Centre on the 2nd floor.
- 5.2 The majority of the effort was concentrated within Peers' Lobby and the Law Lords' Corridor and within a few hours the water flow had reduced to a trickle and had stopped completely in the Peer's Lobby by lunchtime. At the same time as 2,000 books were being removed by the Lords Library, Archives, Works of Art and Visitor Services staff from both Houses, the Fire Brigade put up plastic sheeting to protect the wooden book shelves and remaining books and provided emergency lighting in Peers' Lobby and the Law Lords' Corridor.
- 5.3 Once the water flow had been reduced, instructions were issued to remove all water soaked carpets and underlay and obtain de-humidifiers for immediate use. It was identified quite early that the line of route through Peer's Lobby should be re-opened as soon as possible, and a target of midday the next day was met.

6. Lessons Learned

- 6.1 The maintenance team recognises that it should have undertaken more conclusive action to establish the full extent of the redundant pipework. A Lessons Learned exercise has been completed, which concludes that two additional precautionary procedures are to be adopted in the future:
- 1) To undertake conclusive tests, by pressure testing all unloaded pipework connected to storage tanks, prior to any works or modifications.
 - 2) To update current records having first carried out a full visual check in addition to pressure testing.

- 6.2 A new duty rota is needed in Estates including senior staff, to cover both Houses, and to include a disaster recovery supervisory role, and to circulate it.
- 6.3 In recesses, we need a roster or an 'Officer in Charge' rota indicating which members of senior staff are available to make decisions.
- 6.4 We need to review the location and availability of disaster recovery tools and equipment, relocate where necessary, and publicise the locations.
- 6.5 The House of Lords Library will further tighten up its existing disaster recovery procedures, and will implement a rota system to ensure consistent coverage.
- 6.6 PICT was not informed about the flood until some time after it happened. It is recognised that PICT must be contacted at the start, as it always has an interest, no matter where on the estate an incident occurs.

**Parliamentary Estates Directorate
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