

House of Commons Accommodation Policy

BACKGROUND

1. The demand for accommodation on the House of Commons estate remains high, at a time when the House is committed to cutting costs and seeking to relinquish leasehold property.
2. In the last Parliament, the House of Commons Commission agreed a number of Administration Committee recommendations:
 - a. Members should have priority over office accommodation in the Palace above those staff of the House with no clear business need to be there¹.
 - b. The House Service must recognise that it is in its own interests to occupy no more space than is needed to do its work.²
 - c. 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 standard.³
 - d. No Member should be required to share an office with another Member if they do not wish to do so.⁴
3. In addition the House has resolved to accept a recommendation from the Administration Committee to create a dedicated space for educational visitors on or off the estate.⁵
4. The accommodation policy must reflect the following:
 - a. The strategy for the House of Commons Service 2010-15, particularly the third aim:
 - To make the House Administration more efficient by:
 - Cutting our costs – our first commitment is to reduce our costs by 9% by 2012/13.
 - Becoming a greener, more sustainable Parliament,
 - Doing the work required to enable decisions to be taken on the long-term future of the Palace of Westminster.

¹ HC 1279, Recommendations 8

² HC 1279, Recommendations 9

³ House of Commons Accommodation: Further Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2005-06. HC516

This recommendation was agreed on the presumption that larger offices would be occupied in a way which achieved the new space standards. i.e. by members who are prepared to share them with their staff.....

⁴ HC 1279, Recommendations 5

⁵ [HC Deb c720 12 June 2007](#)

- b. The decision of the House of Commons Commission on 13th December 2010:
- The target for savings (in line with the wider public sector) is at least 17% by 2014/15.
 - The preferred approach is to examine proposals for a redesign of services and organisation to achieve savings, but that there should also be some reductions in budgets and services within existing structures.
 - The options explored should include competitive tendering, combining some services with the Lords and generating income.
- c. The endorsement of the Commission on 17 March to seven workstreams within the Savings Programme, which include identifying options for reducing the cost of the Parliamentary estate.

GENERAL POLICY STATEMENTS

5. The following general policy statements will guide accommodation planning:
- i. *House of Commons accommodation will be managed in a manner that achieves value for money for the public purse.*
 - ii. *The cost of space on the estate will be assessed and used to support decisions on the allocation and use of accommodation.*
 - iii. *The House of Commons will provide accommodation at Westminster for Members together with their staff, House Service staff and third parties whose presence is necessary to support the House, its Committees and other core activities.*
 - iv. *Space will also be provided for facilities that contribute to the working environment, and to accommodate those staff who must be on the estate for these facilities to function successfully.*
 - v. *The House of Commons will work to reduce the cost and environmental impact of its estate. It will generally seek to consolidate its estate in the Palace of Westminster and other freehold property, and to dispose of its leasehold property interests.*
 - vi. *The size and composition of the estate will be based on the best forecasts of requirements in the short, medium and long term.*
 - vii. *The House of Commons will plan and maintain accommodation which is as accessible as practicable to users on the estate. It will ensure the needs of disabled users are taken into consideration and that reasonable adjustments are made while balancing the constraints of a world heritage site.*
 - viii. *The House of Commons will continue to provide space for bicameral functions such as PICT and PED and to facilitate sharing between departments, third*

parties, and the House of Lords. The cost of space on the parliamentary estate should be apportioned in a way which accurately and equitably reflects its use.

- ix. *The House of Commons will work cooperatively with the House of Lords in order, wherever practicable, to provide decant accommodation space suitable for use by either House in a cost effective manner.*

PARTICULAR POLICY STATEMENTS

A number of issues call for particular policy responses, detailed below.

Members

6. The number of Members will reduce at the 2015 election when the Government's proposals to reduce the number of constituencies will come into force. Although it is recognised that no Members or predominantly desk-based staff should be in windowless accommodation, given the proposed reduction in the number of Members it is not considered appropriate in the current financial climate to proceed with the project to reconfigure the Upper Committee Corridor offices. Discussion with the usual channels is needed to establish how far the effect of a reduction in the number of Members in the 2015 Parliament can be reflected in a reduction in the Member and Member staff footprint on the estate.

Policy

7. *Members should be provided cellular office accommodation, and where possible their staff will be accommodated with them in suited accommodation.*
8. *Members will have priority for accommodation in the Palace of Westminster and buildings close to the Chamber over others with no clear business need to be thereⁱ.*
9. *Sufficient office accommodation capacity will be provided for each Member to be located by the Accommodation Whips in an office within the secure part of the Parliamentary estate, whose space, quality, furnishing layout and IT services are consistent with agreed standards.*

Members' Staff

10. The Administration Committee report on Accommodation, in 2006, stated:
“...Members staff numbers constitute the greatest uncertainty as far as accommodation is concerned... as well as one of the areas of greatest potential growth”.⁶ The Committee noted that there were 1.9 Members' staff per Member at the time and recommended that “Members should not expect to be able to accommodate more than two members of staff comfortably at Westminster”.
Following the transfer of responsibility for paying Members from the House to the IPSA, the quality of data held on the number of Members' staff on the estate has reduced. However, based on data from the Pass Office it would appear that the

⁶ House of Commons, Administration Committee, Third Report of Session 2005-06, *House of Commons Accommodation*, HC 1279

average number of staff per Member on the estate has now risen to approximately 2.3. One reason for this increase may be that many of the 2010 Member intake have arrived with a team of staff already formed and expect to have this level of support in future.

11. There is always considerable pressure on accommodation for Members' staff; additional requests for Members' staff accommodation can currently be met by the Accommodation Whips allocating unallocated Members' offices for this purpose. Members' staff accommodation will be managed within the current footprint until 2015 when the effects of the reduction in number of Members will be better understood.

Policy

12. *In line with the Administration Committee's Report, agreed by the House of Commons Commission, the House of Commons will provide sufficient space for Members to have, on average, two members of staff. Variances around this average will be managed within Party space allocations.*

Party Affiliated Organisations

13. The Parliamentary Labour Party secretariat, the Conservative Parliamentary Resource Unit and the Liberal Democrat Resource Unit are currently allocated approximately 425 sqm in total on the Parliamentary estate. This space is used by pooled staff to provide briefing, research, correspondence and related support to their Members. Since the Coalition Government was formed the staff of the Liberal Democrat Research Unit (who were funded from Short Money) have reduced in number and relocated off the estate. Very recently the Labour Party has indicated an intention to set up a similar Resource Unit.

Policy

14. *Any Party affiliated organisation based on the estate must utilise accommodation found from within the relevant party accommodation allocation.*

House Service

15. House staff are employed to support the functions of Parliament and its Members. Given the current financial constraints and drive for cost reduction across the estate, the most cost effective use of space must be made of the space they need. A number of approaches are available to bear down on the requirement for staff to occupy expensive real estate. These include relocation of functions away from central London, home working and outsourcing.
16. The Tebbit Review recommended that opportunities should be sought to improve co-operation between DCCS and DIS by achieving their closer location. This was to be achieved as a result of a planned series of moves intended to enable the windowless offices in the Upper Committee Corridor to be converted. Cost pressures have led to this work being put on hold.

Policy

- 17. Options will be considered for the relocation of functions off the estate, home working and outsourcing. They must though be able to continue to support parliament effectively.*
- 18. Opportunities will continue to be sought to improve the co-operation between DCCS and DIS by closer office location.*

House Service: residential and overnight accommodation

19. The House currently provides residential accommodation for a small number of senior officials and three Office Keepers who are required to provide 24 hour duty cover. Personal overnight accommodation is provided for other staff who are required to be on duty to support the Chamber or Committees in certain circumstances.

Policy

- 20. The House of Commons will continue to provide residential or overnight accommodation for staff where there is a business need for it. This accommodation must be provided in a cost effective manner, within the House of Commons estate where necessary.*

House Service: storage

21. The House of Commons is a paper-heavy organisation. The current Parliamentary Records Management Policy is 'print to paper'. The Print to Web workstream of the Savings Programme and the SPIRE programme will both help the administrations of both Houses to manage electronic information, reducing storage and saving money.

Policy

- 22. Space will only be allocated to storage where this is the most cost effective use of that space*
- 23. The opportunity to reduce the allocation of space to storage following the completion of the Print to Web workstream of the Savings Programme and the introduction of SPIRE will be fully exploited.*

Third Party users of the estate

24. There are approximately 1,000 third party staff on the House of Commons estate, including the Metropolitan Police, the Press, maintenance contractors and the Westminster Gym.
25. Just over one third (36%) of third party staff are allocated a desk within the estate. Of these, nearly 190 are members of the Press Gallery. The remainder utilise other spaces for their roles: mess rooms, workshops, locker rooms, showers and similar

common facilities. Few third party users are charged for the facilities they occupy or use.

Policy

26. Accommodation will be provided for facilities that are agreed by the Management Board and House of Commons Commission as an appropriate contribution to the working environment, and for staff who must be accommodated on the estate for these facilities to operate successfully.

27. Accommodation arrangements for third party occupants should provide value for money for the public purse.

Accommodation standards for all occupants of the estate

Background

28. The House of Commons Commission has agreed the Administration Committee recommendations⁷ of the following space standards:

- 12.5sqm for Members and Heads of Department
- 7.5sqm for Members' staff and House Service

29. A study in 2007 by HOK for the Serjeant at Arms showed that the number of workstations in the outbuildings could be increased by approximately 140 if all space were planned on this basis. It was recognised that this might not be achieved in practice. The study also recognised that these space standards would be difficult to apply in the Palace of Westminster without reducing accommodation capacity.

30. At present, PED is obliged to support a number of inflexible and often bespoke furniture ranges to provide office accommodation, which are often uneconomic solutions, although it is recognised that heritage considerations apply in certain areas of the estate.

Policy

31. The House of Commons will seek to maximise the amount of open plan work space for the House Service in order to increase the capacity and flexibility of space and (where appropriate) promote better working practices. Staff should not expect cellular accommodation unless there is a business need or where the configuration of space makes it more economical than open plan.

32. When future space planning is carried out it will be based on the following space standards agreed by the Commission:

- a. 12.5sqm for Members and Heads of Department*
- b. 7.5sqm for Members' staff and House Service*

⁷ Second Special Report of Session 2006–07, HC 516, Paragraph 2
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33. *There may be circumstances when business requirements or the configuration of Members' cellular office accommodation makes this impractical. In these cases the space will be used as cost effectively as possible.*
34. *Accommodation will be furnished in accordance with the furnishing standards. Where such standards are not yet available they will be provided.*

Decant space for all occupants of the estate

Background

35. Sufficient supply of decant accommodation is required to facilitate ongoing building maintenance, business as usual accommodation moves, refurbishments and upcoming projects. The Department of Facilities is currently developing an accurate decant space requirement, based on the next 10 years of the 25 year Estates Programme. Currently, an element of decant space is available in 4 Millbank and 14 Tothill Street. Number 53 Parliament Street will be refurbished as decant accommodation suitable for Members or other occupants.

Policy

36. *The House of Commons will continue to require some level of additional accommodation to provide flexibility for day to day management of the estate, including major refurbishment work.*
37. *Accommodation will be managed in a way which reduces the cost of churn where this is practicable.*

Agreed by the House of Commons Commission
May 2011