



House of Commons
Select Committee on
Modernisation of the House of
Commons

Connecting Parliament with the Public

First Report of Session 2003–04



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

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The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons

The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons is appointed by the House of Commons to consider how the practices and procedures of the House should be modernised.

Current membership

Mr Peter Hain MP (*Labour, Neath*) (Chairman)
Ann Coffey MP (*Labour, Stockport*)
Barbara Follett MP (*Labour, Stevenage*)
Mr Oliver Heald MP (*Conservative, North East Hertfordshire*)
Mr David Kidney MP (*Labour, Stafford*)
Martin Linton MP (*Labour, Battersea*)
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Anne Picking MP (*Labour, East Lothian*)
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Mr Richard Shepherd MP (*Conservative, Aldridge-Brownhills*)
Mr Andrew Stunell MP (*Liberal Democrat, Hazel Grove*)
Mr Paul Tyler MP (*Liberal Democrat, North Cornwall*)
Sir Nicholas Winterton MP (*Conservative, Macclesfield*)

The following Members were also members of the Committee during the Parliament:

Mr Andrew Mitchell MP (*Conservative, Sutton Coldfield*)
Mr David Cameron MP (*Conservative, Witney*)
Mr Greg Knight MP (*Conservative, East Yorkshire*)
Dr John Reid MP (*Labour, Hamilton North & Bellshill*) (Chairman)
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Mr Robin Cook MP (*Labour, Livingston*) (Chairman)
Mrs Lorna Fitzsimons MP (*Labour, Rochdale*)
Mr John M. Taylor (*Conservative, Solihull*)

Powers

The powers of the Committee are set out in an Appendix to the House of Commons Standing Orders. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/select_committee_on_modernisation_of_the_house_of_commons.cfm A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are George Cubie and Tom Healey (Clerks), Susan Morrison (Chief Office Clerk) and Jane Cooper (Secretary).

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1 Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

1. The House of Commons is the representative institution of the British people. It is here that our laws are made and it is from its Members that governments are formed. The sovereignty of Parliament is the fundamental expression of the sovereignty of the people. It is the apex of our democratic system. As such, it is very much a working place and at any time there are many thousands of passholders, in addition to 659 MPs and around 700 Peers. It is the purpose of this Report to make recommendations which will better reconcile the necessary purpose of Parliament with the reasonable expectation of the people to have access to the processes by which we govern ourselves (Paragraph 2)
2. It serves no-one if we make it difficult for voters to understand what their elected representatives are doing. Too often the impression is given that the House of Commons is a private club, run for the benefit of its Members, where members of the public are tolerated only on sufferance. It is beyond the influence of the House of Commons, let alone this Committee, to arrest international trends of declining participation and trust. However, the Commons can make itself more accessible to those outside, both as interested visitors and as citizens wishing to be more involved in proceedings, it can do more to make it easier for people to understand the work of Parliament, and it can do more to communicate its activity to the world outside (Paragraph 9)

The Citizenship Curriculum

3. We recommend that Ministers in the Department for Education and Skills re-examine the balance of the citizenship curriculum because, while we recognise that the other matters covered by the curriculum such as the balance of rights and responsibilities and community involvement are crucial aspects of citizenship education, an understanding of the country's democratic institutions is also of fundamental importance to today's young people, and to the engaged voters of tomorrow (Paragraph 20)

Educational resources at Westminster

4. We recommend that the House consider the provision of dedicated educational facilities for the use of the Education Unit, including a teaching area, as the National Assembly for Wales does (Paragraph 21)
5. We recommend that the Education Unit be given precedence in the Macmillan Room when the House is sitting in September (Paragraph 22)
6. We also think it would be desirable for the Central Tours Office to offer, in addition to its current tours, a Parliament-in-action Tour which would help visitors to understand how Parliament works and give them a brief taste of select committees,

standing committees, adjournment debates and Westminster Hall as well as the Chamber (Paragraph 23)

Outreach work with schools and colleges

7. Outreach work is the core of the Education Unit's work, and rightly so. The vast majority of young people will not have the opportunity to participate in a school visit to Parliament, and Parliament's educational activities must therefore be tailored to those who wish to learn about Parliament in the classroom. To supplement existing resources such as the website, outreach facilities such as a Parliamentary roadshow could have the potential to reach many more young people than currently are able to visit Parliament. We recommend that before any further consideration is given to establishing an educational roadshow, the House should examine the scope for a Parliamentary partnering scheme with, for example, local authorities. Parliament's contribution to the teaching of political literacy could be delivered to people in their own communities (in schools, libraries and council premises) by way of joint enterprise (Paragraph 27)
8. The Education Unit already does a great deal of work building links with individual teachers, schools and colleges. We recommend that it should do more to publicise its work to Members, and to build links with local education authorities (Paragraph 28)

Use of the Chamber

9. We believe there is a case for reconsideration of the long-standing convention that only elected Members of Parliament may ever sit in the Chamber, which is in contrast to the practice of many other legislatures (Paragraph 29)

New Voters

10. We recommend that the House devise a new voter's guide to be sent to all young people around the time of their eighteenth birthday (Paragraph 32)

The Internet

11. We are convinced of the need for a radical upgrading of the website at an early opportunity, which will require significant investment in systems and staff. The financial implications of this are for the Finance and Services Committee and the House of Commons Commission to consider (Paragraph 50)
12. We recommend that the Broadcasting Committee keep under review the possibilities offered by the digital broadcasting of Parliament (Paragraph 52)

On-line consultations

13. We believe that the greater use of on-line consultation is a good way for Parliament to take account of the views of the wider public (Paragraph 53)

14. There have now been several experiments with on-line consultation on an ad hoc basis, both by select committees and by all-party groups. They have generally been successful and have proved effective as a way of engaging members of the public in the work that we do and of giving a voice to those who would otherwise be excluded. We urge select committees and joint committees considering draft legislation to make on-line consultation a more regular aspect of their work (Paragraph 59)

A Commons newsletter

15. We recommend that the House make available to those interested in receiving the information (by post, e-mail or other convenient method of communication) a weekly newsletter. Aimed at the general, non-specialist reader, it should summarise the business of the previous week and set out forthcoming business for the following week. In due course, it may be possible to extend this service to allow for communication of other information by e-mail (such as the daily list of papers available in the Vote Office) and regular, subject-based updates for which users could subscribe. A printed form of the newsletter should be made available to visitors at various points around the Parliamentary Estate, including the bookshop. Electronically, it should occupy a prominent position on or near the front page of the Parliamentary website (Paragraph 63)

Information for young people

16. We recommend that, as development of the website progresses, the House authorities, in consultation with young people, develop the website in a form which is more accessible to them (Paragraph 65)

Visitors to the Parliamentary Estate

17. To the extent that there is conflict between the needs of different groups of visitors, we believe that the House should, as a matter of principle, give priority to the needs of those who come to see and participate in the work of Parliament over those whose primary interest is the Palace of Westminster as a historical building (Paragraph 66)

A visitor centre

18. We welcome the work of the Administration and Accommodation and Works Committees and the House's endorsement of the proposals for the construction of the reception and security building. (Paragraph 80)
19. We recognise the several unique difficulties involved in establishing new visitor facilities near the Palace of Westminster, but urge that all possible options are explored (Paragraph 81)
20. Our starting point is that any Visitor Centre project should have four main objectives:
- a) it must provide a welcome to visitors;

- b) it must provide an interesting and friendly environment;
- c) it should make Parliament more accessible, allowing visitors to see at least something of what Parliament is and does without necessarily having to visit the galleries, committees or take a tour; and
- d) it must improve public understanding and knowledge of the work and role of Parliament.

The new reception and security building will help to meet the first of these objectives; it will use visitor staff so that visitors' first contact with staff of the House will come from someone whose primary concern is to greet them and make them feel welcome. A major review of signage, currently underway, should also help to make the environment more welcoming. There may also be scope to improve the current facilities designed to meet the other three objectives but in our view the need for a dedicated Visitor Centre remains. Once the overdue improvement to Parliament's welcome and access has been addressed, attention can focus on meeting the other three main objectives of the Visitor Centre Project through planning for a dedicated Visitor Centre (Paragraph 82)

21. Participants in the Hansard Society's Connecting Communities with Parliament programme suggested a number of ways in which visitors' experience of the Parliamentary Estate could be improved for a very modest cost. The main proposals were:
- a) More staff on-hand specifically to welcome visitors, tell them what they could see and point them in the right direction, handing them a written guide, perhaps including a plan and an indication of what visitors were able to do.
 - b) A sign at the entrance saying 'Welcome to the Houses of Parliament'.
 - c) Better signage in general, indicating such things as toilets, the Jubilee Café, the Grand Committee Room, Committee Corridor, etc.
 - d) Improved queuing systems for the Gallery.
 - e) The possibility of a 'viewing gallery' which would allow visitors to pass along the corridor at the back of the Gallery, seeing the House while it is sitting but not stopping to listen to the debate.

We welcome these practical suggestions and we commend them to the House authorities (Paragraph 85)

'Strangers'

22. We recommend that the term 'Strangers' be no longer used in referring to visitors to the House of Commons (Paragraph 86)

Access to the Gallery when the House is sitting

23. We recommend that further consideration be given to ways in which groups of visitors touring the building might be able to pass through the gallery as part of a tour so that they are able to witness aspects of Parliament in action (Paragraph 89)

Saturday opening

24. We recommend that the Administration Committee consider Saturday opening of the Line of Route—for Members' parties as well as paying groups—to assess its feasibility (Paragraph 91)
25. We further recommend that the Administration Committee consider the feasibility of allowing Members to book guided tours of the Line of Route throughout the Summer opening on a similar basis to that on which they can book tours on sitting days (Paragraph 91)

Standing committees

26. We recommend that the Procedure Committee consider how better to present the information from the bill, explanatory notes, amendment paper and selection list, either on paper or electronically, so that when an amendment is being debated Members and visitors can see the original clause, the clause as amended, and an explanatory note on both, so that the issue under debate is clear to all (Paragraph 94)
27. We recommend that a guide for visitors to standing committees on bills should also be produced (Paragraph 95)

Public petitions

28. We believe that there is a case for the House to do more with public petitions which, if handled correctly, represent a potentially significant avenue for communication between the public and Parliament (Paragraph 99)
29. We recommend that the Liaison Committee and Procedure Committee consider a process whereby public petitions should automatically stand referred to the relevant select committee. It would then be for the committee to decide whether or not to conduct an inquiry into the issues raised, or to take them into account in the context of a current or forthcoming inquiry (Paragraph 100)

Rules governing the submission of petitions

30. We recommend that the House accept petitions in both typescript and manuscript, although the present restriction against interlineations, deletions and insertions should be retained so that it is clear that the wording of the petition has not been changed without the petitioner's knowledge. The top sheet—the authoritative copy of the petition—should continue to be distinguished from sheets of additional signatures by the Member presenting it signing in the top right-hand corner, as is the current practice (Paragraph 104)

The House of Commons and the media

31. We welcome the progress that has been made in recent years to improve the House's communications strategy, in particular the establishment of the posts of Communications Adviser and Media Adviser and the Select Committee Media Officers. The Group on Information for the Public has likewise played a vital role. But we believe that there is scope for greater co-ordination of the House's media and communications resources. We therefore recommend the establishment of a central press office for the House of Commons, to take a more pro-active role in promoting the House and its work (Paragraph 121)
32. We recommend that the Board of Management and the House of Commons Commission urgently consider whether there is scope for further improving the co-ordination of the House's media, educational and communications resources and planning, with effective Member oversight and close liaison with appropriate officials and Members of the House of Lords (Paragraph 122)

Promoting Hansard

33. We recommend that the Department of the Official Report aim to produce a simple index to the daily part of Hansard once the necessary technological changes have been seen through (Paragraph 123)
34. We recommend that the Hansard report of a debate should be posted on the internet at the same time as it is sent to the printer, to be replaced with the published version the following day (Paragraph 125)

The Press Gallery

35. Consideration should be given to allowing journalists to bring laptop computers into the Press Gallery (Paragraph 126)

2 Introduction

1. The legitimacy of the House of Commons, as the principal representative body in British democracy, rests upon the support and engagement of the electorate. The decline in political participation and engagement in recent years, as well as in levels of trust in politicians, political parties and the institutions of State should be of concern to every citizen. But it should be of particular concern to the House of Commons.

2. The House of Commons is the representative institution of the British people. It is here that our laws are made and it is from its Members that governments are formed. The sovereignty of Parliament is the fundamental expression of the sovereignty of the people. It is the apex of our democratic system. As such, it is very much a working place and at any time there are many thousands of passholders, in addition to 659 MPs and around 700 Peers. It is the purpose of this Report to make recommendations which will better reconcile the necessary purpose of Parliament with the reasonable expectation of the people to have access to the processes by which we govern ourselves.

3. Politicians have always scored low on levels of trust but even so there is a noticeable downward trend, with fewer and fewer people trusting politicians. Lower levels of trust are translating into a disconnection from the institutions of democracy. The fall in election turnout from a post-war high of 84% in 1950 to 59% in 2001 is the most obvious indicator of this decline. Turnout at elections in the UK is lower than most other European countries.¹

4. The general distrust of politicians is in contrast to the high regard in which individual MPs are held by the people they represent. Ben Page of MORI told us that individual MPs remain fairly credible in the public eye: it is politicians as a group who are distrusted. He also explained that familiarity breeds favourability: people are more likely to have a favourable view of an institution about which they feel they are well-informed. This was reflected in our public meetings and in the on-line consultation. People spoke favourably of individual MPs (including their own) but were distrustful of politicians in general. Connecting with the public is therefore one way of tackling voters' cynicism about the political process.

5. The Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society recently conducted an audit of political engagement which showed that only 51% of people were very likely to vote at a general election.² Fewer than half could name their own MP. However, the report also highlights other trends. While people may be less engaged with traditional forms of politics, new forms of political activity are emerging. Increasing numbers of people are becoming active at the local level, more people are writing to their MP about issues, and more are joining single-issue groups.³

1 At the European Parliamentary Elections in 1999, UK turnout was just 24%, lower than in any other Member State. Overall turnout across the EU was 49.4% See *Results of the elections to the European Parliament in the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1999; seats won, share of the vote by party, voter turnout across the EU*, European Parliament UK Office, 2002.

2 *An audit of political engagement*, Hansard Society and Electoral Commission, March 2004. The figure shows the proportion of people who put their likelihood of voting at an immediate general election at 10 on a scale of 1 to 10.

3 *Ibid.*, Figure 13, p. 35.

6. But for parliamentary democracy to thrive the public must understand and engage with Parliament itself. The Electoral Commission/Hansard Society report found that 67% knew nothing or very little about Westminster.⁴

7. Yet there are still significant numbers of people interested in politics. The task for the House of Commons is to harness that interest. Of course, the level of public interest in Parliament will, to a large extent, be determined by the events taking place within either House. Live television coverage and webcasting mean that more people are now able to observe proceedings in Parliament directly than at any other time in history. For example, viewing figures for the BBC Parliament hit an all-time high earlier this year for the Second Reading of the Higher Education Bill in the House of Commons. For a brief period during that debate, the number of people watching the parliamentary channel was higher than for any other news channel.

8. Parliamentary debates will not always merit the sort of public interest or media attention that occur around such decisive votes. Such interest cannot simply be manufactured and it is not our concern merely to boost media coverage. However, the evidence—both formal and informal—we received during the course of this inquiry showed that the current structure and proceedings often actively work against attempts to increase public interest in and engagement with Parliament. We heard from members of the public visiting the Commons to witness debates and committee hearings that the building was unwelcoming, reception facilities were poor, and information about the proceedings was inadequate. We heard similar views from journalists, academics, outside organisations, and from Members themselves—that the business of the Commons is often difficult to understand; information is hard to find; and too little is done to explain the work of the Commons and engage with those outside Westminster.

9. It serves no-one if we make it difficult for voters to understand what their elected representatives are doing. Too often the impression is given that the House of Commons is a private club, run for the benefit of its Members, where members of the public are tolerated only on sufferance. It is beyond the influence of the House of Commons, let alone this Committee, to arrest international trends of declining participation and trust. However, the Commons can make itself more accessible to those outside, both as interested visitors and as citizens wishing to be more involved in proceedings, it can do more to make it easier for people to understand the work of Parliament, and it can do more to communicate its activity to the world outside.

10. One of the principal objectives of the House of Commons Commission's Strategic Plan is

‘to improve public understanding and knowledge of the work of the House and to increase its accessibility, subject to the requirements of security’.⁵

11. Much has already been done to advance the achievement of this objective: the work of the Education Unit with schools and teachers; the summer opening of the Palace in August and September, now a permanent feature; better design of Select Committee Reports, with

4 *Ibid.*, paragraph 5.9.

5 *An outline strategic plan for the House of Commons Administration 2002–2007*, as adopted by the House of Commons Commission on 24 June 2002.

improved public information about Committee work and meetings; a webcasting scheme covering debates in both Chambers, Westminster Hall, and Standing and Select Committees; a redesign of the www.parliament.uk website; and the opening of the Jubilee Café for visitors.⁶

12. But it is not just in the areas within the Commission's responsibility that Parliament connects (or fails to connect) with the public. Connecting Parliament with the public goes beyond those measures taken by the two Houses which are primarily intended to improve the public understanding of their work. It encompasses many of the practices and procedures of Parliament in which the public are involved, as citizens and constituents as well as visitors. We therefore felt that this was an area where we could make a useful contribution, although it is one in which other committees and bodies, such as the Commission, also have responsibility.

13. With this in mind, this Report sets out a series of practical recommendations designed

- a) to make the building more accessible and welcoming to constituents,
- b) to make greater efforts to engage young people, and
- c) to encourage better use of information and communication technology.

Better engagement with the public should have an impact on our procedures: the more people understand and relate to what we do, the more they may feel able to influence parliamentary activity, by contacting their MP, by submitting evidence to select committees and by a variety of other means.

14. We appreciate that many of our proposals will entail expenditure by the House, possibly substantial sums. They will have to be considered, alongside other proposals for change and reform, by the House of Commons Commission and the Finance and Services Committee.

Conduct of the inquiry

15. We have consulted very widely during the course of our inquiry. We held informal discussions with numerous officials of the House and outside experts, including academics, journalists and young people. We organised a seminar at Westminster and two public evidence sessions. A complete list of those we consulted is at Annex A. In December 2003, we sent a questionnaire to all Members of Parliament seeking their views on the issues covered in this inquiry, which received a total of 179 responses. A summary of the responses is at Annex B.

16. We also commissioned the Hansard Society to run an on-line consultation on our behalf, during the month of March 2004. We held two meetings with participants in the Society's Connecting Communities with Parliament programme. Our consultations, which included a public meeting in Reading and meetings with members of the public in Birmingham and Cardiff, gave us a feel for how Parliament is seen by the world outside

⁶ *House of Commons Commission Twenty-fourth Annual Report, 2001–02*, HC 1002, Session 2001–02, paragraph 34. See also Annex A, Report by the Board of Management, paragraphs 25–34.

and an indication of where changes might help Parliament to reconnect with the public it serves. They form the backbone of the recommendations we make in the following chapters.

3 Connecting with young people

The Parliamentary Education Unit

17. The Parliamentary Education Unit was established in 1980 by both Houses. The Unit is managed by the House of Commons Library, with 70% of running costs being met by the Commons and 30% by the Lords. It has two main functions: sponsoring visits to Parliament by school students on a range of programmes and providing resources for teachers and students in the classroom.

18. The main visits programme is the Autumn Visits Programme, aimed at 16–18 year olds studying politics or related subjects. There are four sessions a day during September and October, each of which can accommodate up to 80 students. The session consists of a welcome and introduction, a video presentation, a question and answer session with a guest speaker (usually an MP or Peer) and the Line of Route.⁷ Each year, around 7,800 students from 220 institutions take part. In addition to the Autumn Programme, there are three other visits programmes:

- a) The Discover Parliament programme, which takes place every Monday during term time. Up to 32 places are available each day for pupils aged 13–15, who undertake an audio tour of parts of the Palace and listen to a debate in the House of Lords.
- b) The Citizenship for the 21st Century programme supports the National Curriculum for Citizenship for 7–12 year olds and takes place on Tuesdays and Thursdays during term time. It consists of a presentation, question and answer session, activities and an opportunity to listen to a debate.
- c) Pupil Parliaments, which take the form of an organised debate for 64 pupils, take place on ten Fridays each year. The participants are aged 12–18; they have the opportunity to discuss the Motion and debating techniques with an MP before the debate takes place.

The Citizenship Curriculum

19. The Citizenship Curriculum is one of the most important ways in which young people learn about Parliament, as well as the wider political system. All the young people we spoke to during the course of the inquiry, including young people in Reading, students in Wales and Members of the Youth Parliament (with whom we held an informal discussion at Westminster), emphasised that this was the principal route by which young people learned about Parliament.

20. We heard repeated concerns from young people themselves about the lack of focus given to Parliament in the overall context of the school curriculum. Some of those we spoke to drew contrasts between the low level of knowledge of the political process in this

7 The Line of Route is the route visitors take around the Palace of Westminster.

country and the attention paid to citizenship matters in some other countries. There was a lengthy discussion of this subject at our public meeting in Reading, for example. **We recommend that Ministers in the Department for Education and Skills re-examine the balance of the citizenship curriculum because, while we recognise that the other matters covered by the curriculum such as the balance of rights and responsibilities and community involvement are crucial aspects of citizenship education, an understanding of the country's democratic institutions is also of fundamental importance to today's young people, and to the engaged voters of tomorrow.**

Educational resources at Westminster

21. The National Curriculum has helped to stimulate demand for Parliamentary teaching materials, but Parliament is only a small part of a very broad curriculum, which deals with many other aspects of public affairs. With additional resources, the Education Unit would be able to improve the provision of teaching materials and fill some of the gaps in the current provision, such as the absence, for example, of a video on the committee system. A particular problem is the lack of any dedicated space for educational purposes. At present they use a committee room, where the layout is not necessarily best suited to their needs and they are unable to establish permanent displays. The National Assembly for Wales, at its Visitor Centre in the Pierhead Building (based in Cardiff Bay, near the main Assembly building), has a dedicated Education Centre, including classrooms and a mock Chamber where pupils can stage debates. **We recommend that the House consider the provision of dedicated educational facilities for the use of the Education Unit, including a teaching area, as the National Assembly for Wales does.**

22. It will be some time before a dedicated teaching area can be provided. In the meantime it is important that we find ways of allowing the Education Unit to expand its work. Under the new sitting arrangements, there are two or three weeks in September when the House is sitting during school term times. This can create problems for the Education Unit, which must compete with others for the use of committee rooms. **We recommend that the Education Unit be given precedence in the Macmillan Room when the House is sitting in September.**

23. **We also think it would be desirable for the Central Tours Office to offer, in addition to its current tours, a Parliament-in-action Tour which would help visitors to understand how Parliament works and give them a brief taste of select committees, standing committees, adjournment debates and Westminster Hall as well as the Chamber.** This approach was adopted by the Hansard Society in its Connecting Parliament with Communities programme which provided us with valuable evidence during our inquiry.

Outreach work with schools and colleges

24. Given the small proportion of students who are able to visit Parliament—both because of the time and expense required to travel to London from many parts of the country and because of the limited number of places—much of the Unit's work consists of providing teaching resources. These include a website,⁸ two series of booklets, two videos, wallcharts,

and a sample selection of parliamentary materials including old bills, order papers and Hansards. Consideration had been given to the possibility of establishing a roadshow, which could reach around 200 schools per year. It would require three or four staff plus a dedicated, specially equipped vehicle. The annual cost would probably exceed £500,000.

25. The further away from London that a student is educated the more he or she is likely to have to rely on broadcast and on-line communication, both to fulfil the requirements of elements in the citizenship curriculum and to satisfy more specific interests in political issues. We have received evidence from students and teachers in such circumstances that their attempts to take advantage of the existing websites have been frustrated by a lack of appreciation of their needs and difficulty in navigating to obtain essential information.⁹ Other materials produced by the Education Unit can provide only limited back-up for these studies. New technology offers so many innovative tools for communication. A virtual tour of the Palace of Westminster (demonstrating how a bill makes its progress through the two Houses, for example) is now possible. So too are more interactive mechanisms. We believe that further feedback from schools and colleges—especially those who have as yet not found these existing resources useful—must be sought as a matter of urgency.

26. The National Assembly for Wales has developed some very impressive outreach work through its Public Information and Education Service. It has opened a second Visitor and Exhibition Centre at Colwyn Bay, including an interactive exhibition, educational facilities and a shop. It has an Education Officer based in North Wales, who works with schools in that region and four regional teams who provide an Assembly presence outside Cardiff. They run stands at a number of national and regional events, such as the Royal Welsh Show and the National, International and Urdd Eisteddfodau, as well as smaller-scale stalls at local libraries and supermarkets around Wales. The Scottish Parliament runs a Partner Library Network of 80 local authority libraries where local community groups are invited to learn about the Scottish Parliament from MSP and Parliament staff.¹⁰

27. Outreach work is the core of the Education Unit's work, and rightly so. The vast majority of young people will not have the opportunity to participate in a school visit to Parliament, and Parliament's educational activities must therefore be tailored to those who wish to learn about Parliament in the classroom. To supplement existing resources such as the website, outreach facilities such as a Parliamentary roadshow could have the potential to reach many more young people than currently are able to visit Parliament. We recommend that before any further consideration is given to establishing an educational roadshow, the House should examine the scope for a Parliamentary partnering scheme with, for example, local authorities. Parliament's contribution to the teaching of political literacy could be delivered to people in their own communities (in schools, libraries and council premises) by way of joint enterprise.

⁹ We discuss the websites in detail at paragraphs 35 to 65.

¹⁰ QQ 77–80.

Promoting the Education Unit

28. It was Parliament, through the Education Act 1996, that put citizenship on the secondary school curriculum. Yet little has been done to give the Education Unit the extra resources it needs to ensure that Parliament is central to the citizenship curriculum. We heard from Duncan Cullimore, School Improvement Officer (14–19) of the London Borough of Lewisham, who runs an innovative citizenship curriculum including the election of a Young Mayor and the involvement of young people in Young Citizens Panels, Young Volunteers Programmes and Neighbourhood Forums. We heard from Chris Weeds of the Education Unit that her unit was able to offer tours of Parliament through its Discover Parliament programme to a maximum of 8,500 young people a year, but demand is far greater and the Central Tours Office handles another 47,000 school children a year, 85% of the total number of visitors from educational institutions. **The Education Unit already does a great deal of work building links with individual teachers, schools and colleges. We recommend that it should do more to publicise its work to Members, and to build links with local education authorities.**

Use of the Chamber

29. We heard from representatives of the UK Youth Parliament, the Parliamentary Education Officer and the School Improvements Officer at Lewisham Borough Council about the tremendous advantages there would be in allowing young people, students and members of the UK Youth Parliament to meet and debate occasionally in the Chamber of the House of Commons when Parliament is not sitting. **We believe there is a case for reconsideration of the long-standing convention that only elected Members of Parliament may ever sit in the Chamber, which is in contrast to the practice of many other legislatures.**

New voters

30. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the younger an elector is, the less likely he or she is to vote. Successive surveys have shown that young people are more likely to be disengaged from the political process in general and from political institutions such as the House of Commons in particular. They are less likely to see voting as their civic duty, and their propensity to vote is therefore more likely to depend on other factors, such as how likely they think it is that their vote will ‘make a difference’.¹¹

31. At present, there is nothing to mark an individual’s acquiring the right to vote by attaining the age of 18. Several people suggested to us that the House of Commons, as the principal democratic body in the country, should mark young people’s reaching voting age by sending them some kind of communication on their eighteenth birthday. The aim would be to encourage them to register to vote if they had not already done so, and to use their vote. Suggestions ranged from a simple letter from the Speaker, to a more comprehensive ‘new voter’s guide’ containing detailed information on how to register to vote; the role and function of an MP, local councillor and other elected officials; how

11 See, for example, *Age of electoral majority*, Electoral Commission, April 2004, pp. 45–52; *An audit of political engagement*, Electoral Commission and Hansard Society, March 2004; *Young People and Politics—A Report of the YVote?/Ynot? Project*, Children and Young People’s Unit, Department for Education and Skills, July 2002.

politics affects people's lives and a brief history of Parliament.¹² The suggestion found particular favour with Members: in our survey an overwhelming majority supported the proposal.¹³

32. We recommend that the House devise a new voter's guide to be sent to all young people around the time of their eighteenth birthday. Other bodies, such as the Hansard Society and the Electoral Commission,¹⁴ will need to be consulted, but it is important that the guide, whatever form it takes, is seen to come from the House of Commons.

4 Provision of information for the public

The Internet

33. Professor Stephen Coleman of the Oxford Internet Institute pointed out to us that many more people now 'visit' Parliament virtually than physically.¹⁵ Peter Riddell of *The Times* argued that the Internet is now the principal means by which Parliament as an institution communicates with voters and that it had significantly reduced the importance of press reporting of Parliament:

'We are never going to get back to the days of massive reporting in the press of Parliament and in many respects I think it is less important now because of the Internet. I think the answer to a lot of your questions ... [is] to do with the parliamentary website, which is as relevant to us as working journalists who use it ... as it is to your constituents and I think a lot of the answers to your questions are improving the website and improving the information in that way.'¹⁶

34. The Web Centre Project Board told us that *Hansard* is now accessed online by many more people than receive the printed edition, as are many select committee publications and much legislative material.¹⁷ Getting the website right is therefore probably the single most important thing that Parliament needs to do in this area.

The Parliamentary websites

35. There are three Parliamentary websites: the main site at www.parliament.uk, the educational site for schools and colleges, www.explore.parliament.uk and the webcasting site, www.parliamentlive.tv. Between them, these sites carry a vast archive of material including virtually every official parliamentary publication since the mid-1990s,¹⁸ a

12 For example, Andrew Sparrow of *The Daily Telegraph*, Ev 69–70.

13 85% rated it 3 or higher on a 5-point scale; 56% rated it 1.

14 The Hansard Society is currently producing a guide, *Your Parliament: Make it work for you*, in association with the two Houses. This might form the basis of a new voter's guide. The Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to promote public awareness of the electoral system and the governmental system of the UK (Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, s. 13).

15 Q 111.

16 QQ 1, 13 & 67.

17 Ev 63.

18 Some papers which are laid before the House of Commons by the Government pursuant to an Act of Parliament are printed by Order of the House. These 'Act papers' are not housed on the Parliamentary website since they do not originate in Parliament, but many of them are available via the websites of the relevant Government department or agency.

directory of MPs, Peers and staff, general information for the public about how Parliament works, Library Research Papers, practical information for visitors, live audiovisual coverage of both Chambers and Westminster Hall, and audio-only and audiovisual recordings of recent committee meetings. There are over 9,000 pages hosted directly on the Commons site alone, and over a million pages of linked publications.¹⁹

36. The House of Commons has made tremendous advances in recent years in the development of its website, part of the www.parliament.uk website run by the Parliamentary Communications Directorate on behalf of both Houses of Parliament. In July 2002, the House of Commons Information Committee produced a Report entitled *Digital Technology: Working for Parliament and the Public*.²⁰ The Report set out five draft principles for information and communication technologies, which it recommended the House should adopt, reporting annually on progress against each one. The principles, which the House of Commons Commission has agreed to take into account in its strategic planning, and which we endorse, are:

- A. To use information and communications technology (ICT) to increase the accessibility of the House and to enable the public, exercising its right to use whatever medium is convenient, to communicate with Members and with Committees of the House.
- B. To use ICT to enhance the professionalism of Members, their staff and House staff in all aspects of parliamentary life.
- C. To use ICT to increase public participation in the work of the House, enabling it to draw on the widest possible pool of experience, including particularly those who have traditionally been excluded from the political and parliamentary process.
- D. To recognise the value of openness and use ICT to enable, as far as possible, the public to have access to its proceedings and papers.
- E. To develop and share good practice in the use of ICT by other parliamentary and governmental bodies both within the United Kingdom and elsewhere, and to work in collaboration with outside bodies.²¹

37. A new design for the main website was launched in conjunction with a content management tool in the summer of 2002. The new design won a number of accolades. It was described as ‘simple, elegant and business-like’ and ‘the best example of “open government” adoption of internet technologies that we have seen’ by the British Web Design and Marketing Association. Since the re-design there has been a steady increase in use of the www.parliament.uk site, reaching over 2.5 million page requests on the main server and over 5 million hits (300,000 unique users) on the publications server in the month of January 2004.

19 Some of this material is not published directly on the Parliament website, but by contract partners such as The Stationery Office Ltd.

20 First Report from the Committee, Session 2001–02, HC 1065.

21 *Ibid.*, paragraph 11.

38. Given the size and importance of the site, the scale of the investment which lay behind the 2002 redesign was very modest (around £100,000 shared by both Houses, plus some £30,000 on improvements to the search engine). Furthermore, there are only two staff dedicated to co-ordinating content on the website, both shared between the two Houses. Most content is generated in a decentralised way by various staff throughout the two Houses, as a by-product of their other duties.

39. Unlike some other organisations, the House cannot easily make savings in other areas to pay for web development. Web publication does not replace the need to provide printed documents for internal and external use (in particular, for libraries); nor does the development of the Explore Parliament website replace expenditure on the school visits programme; nor webcasting replace televised broadcasting; nor on-line consultation replace conventional consultation by committees. The House authorities have had to consider plans to expand and enhance the website alongside a range of other pressures on the administration budget.

40. Despite the progress that has been made, there is widespread dissatisfaction with the main website. As part of the Connecting Communities with Parliament programme, participants were asked to find the answer to a series of questions on the website. When we met participants in Birmingham and Reading, almost all of them told us they had experienced some difficulty finding the answers even to simple questions. Many suggested that the search facility was not satisfactory and that information was not classified and grouped in a helpful way.²²

41. These views were shared by Professor Coleman, who told us that the website worked well for people who knew exactly what they were looking for but not for the majority of people. He thought that the website could not be said to be performing a 'democratic function' unless it was able to reach those people 'who cannot find what they might need but they do not even know is there'.²³

Options for change

42. A number of incremental enhancements to the websites have recently been made or are currently in the pipeline. These include live webcasting (some in audio only) of all public sessions, more and better guidance for the uninitiated on how to use the site, a more informative and topical 'news' page, more inward links to the site, specimen pages illustrating the parliamentary art collections, progress towards RNIB certification and further use of e-consultation.

43. The Committee Office is working on a range of improvements to the presentation and usability of select committee material on the web with a view to making the scrutiny role of the House clearer to the non-specialist user.

22 For example, that select committee publications were listed in chronological order by Session, rather than being grouped by inquiry or subject.

23 Q 100.

44. Work is also continuing on options for improving the accuracy and usefulness of the search engine, for example by automatically linking common-usage terms to official language (e.g. 'dole' to 'unemployment benefit').

45. Further research could also be commissioned into the needs and interests of potential target audiences (e.g. young people, aged people, ethnic minorities, the disabled) for whom there may be better ways of explaining and presenting information about the House of Commons using the internet. Such research would be an essential prelude to any future fundamental upgrade of the site, but need not hold up the other improvements outlined here.

46. The first phase of Parliamentary Information Management Services (PIMS) is currently being designed and implemented. Towards the end of 2004 this will replace the existing POLIS on-line index to parliamentary information for internal users and allow the libraries of both Houses to provide Members of both Houses and their staff with a much improved full-text on-line information service, equipped with a powerful search engine.

47. Although the priority for PIMS is to replace ageing systems for internal information management, the content management and search tools needed for the project have been selected with the possibility in mind that they could be adapted and extended to cover the whole of the parliamentary intranet and internet sites in the future. Integration with e-mail might also make 'e-alerting' possible for internal and external users.²⁴ The technical and financial implications are being explored actively on behalf of both Houses. Subject to feasibility and a full exploration of the costs and benefits, these developments could pave the way to significant improvements for users of the www.parliament.uk site from 2005 onwards.

48. The costs of such a significant enhancement would not be limited to software licences and technical integration. Even with the help of sophisticated content management and search tools, a user friendly, continuously updated on-line 'encyclopaedia' of parliamentary activity would require significant additional editorial work to ensure accuracy, impartiality and high-quality explanatory material which helps users to understand the work of Parliament and how it differs from Government. Additional staff, and additional accommodation to house them, would be needed to support a high-quality service of that kind.

49. As noted above, the House of Lords has very similar interests to the House of Commons in these matters and close cooperation is a practical necessity. Decisions to invest more would therefore have to be closely coordinated with the authorities of the House of Lords. Both the PIMS project and exploratory work to improve web services (internal and external) are already being managed by joint project boards under a joint Information Systems Programme Board for both Houses.

50. There is scope for improvement to the accessibility and usability of the House of Commons area of the parliamentary website (and of the website as a whole) both in the short and the medium term. While incremental changes of the kind described above can be made during the financial year 2004–05, a more radical overhaul of design and

²⁴ That is, alerting people by e-mail or SMS to new material on the website or forthcoming business which might be of interest to them.

searchability linked to the whole range of parliamentary documentation will not be possible until the first phase of the PIMS project has been completed at the end of 2004. **We are convinced of the need for a radical upgrading of the website at an early opportunity, which will require significant investment in systems and staff. The financial implications of this are for the Finance and Services Committee and the House of Commons Commission to consider.**

Interactivity

51. Digital media have a number of characteristics which determine the way in which they can be used. They are ‘deep media’, containing many layers and types of information, which users can store, retrieve or search for at the level of their choice. Digital media are capable of reaching a small, target audience; they are interactive, capable of conveying users’ feedback; and they do not embody clear boundaries between different types of media, such as television, the press, radio and photography. Professor Stephen Coleman argued that it was important to recognise the distinction between connecting with the public as spectators and connecting with them as participants; treating the Internet simply as ‘television for small audiences’ was a mistake.²⁵

52. The BBC Parliament channel is broadcast on digital television, which is also an interactive medium. It is likely that in the fullness of time the House may be able to exploit the interactivity of digital television to connect more directly with viewers. The BBC told us that the channel’s audience drops sharply during a division, which is unsurprising given that all they can broadcast is Members milling around in the Chamber for fifteen minutes. It may be that these hiatuses could be used to promote some interactive features of the medium. **We recommend that the Broadcasting Committee keep under review the possibilities offered by the digital broadcasting of Parliament.**

On-line consultations

53. The internet is more than a medium for publishing documents and broadcasting proceedings in Parliament; it is an interactive medium that allows genuine two-way communication between politicians and the people they represent. Of the five questions we asked in our on-line consultation, the one which attracted the most responses—nearly half the total—was ‘does Parliament adequately reflect the concerns of ordinary people?’ While some respondents thought that it did, the overall impression was that it did not. **We believe that the greater use of on-line consultation is a good way for Parliament to take account of the views of the wider public.**

54. Professor Coleman pointed out that on-line consultation is something which the UK Parliament has pioneered:

‘On-line policy consultations are something that you have in fact pioneered, and have done better than any other parliament in the world. There is quite a lot of data suggesting that these consultations have had an effect on the fairly small minority of people who have engaged in them—because they have been deliberative, because

25 Private meeting on 22nd January 2003.

they have been expansive over a period of a month, and because you have taken people seriously.²⁶

55. The House has so far conducted several on-line consultations in partnership with the Hansard Society, on subjects such as the draft Communications Bill, the Family Tax Credit, and electronic democracy. It is not only select committees which have initiated these consultations: the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) commissioned a forum to discuss issues relating to flood management and the All-Party Group on Domestic Violence also commissioned a forum.²⁷ Professor Coleman told us that these consultations had generally been successful, drawing on public expertise, treating the public with respect and encouraging a respectful attitude. It was notable that Parliamentary consultations did not attract the actionable or offensive contributions which accounted for 20–25% of those submitted to Government departments' on-line forums.

56. The purpose of on-line consultations must be made clear to participants—they are being asked to provide advice and information, not to make policy. Parliament must also make a clear commitment to the process, providing interaction with, and responses to, the public participants. Good on-line consultations therefore always need facilitators or moderators to guide (and where necessary edit) the discussion. Participants can remain anonymous in the public forum—for some subjects, this might be a prerequisite for participation—but they need to register so that they are identifiable to some independent third party.

57. The Information Committee's Report endorsed these views on on-line consultations, adding that special efforts needed to be made to identify individuals and organisations who could impart experience and expertise to the consultation, and to make on-line consultations socially inclusive.

58. We conducted our own on-line consultation as part of this inquiry, both to canvass public opinion on the issues we were examining and to explore the consultation process itself. We devised the list of key questions that we wanted participants to address and the Hansard Society designed, maintained and moderated the site.²⁸ The exercise generated a total of 152 responses from a wide range of people ranging from those with a long-standing interest in or connection with Parliament to those with no special interest in Parliament at all. It is highly unlikely that we would have received such a volume and range of responses to a traditional 'call for evidence' inviting interested parties to submit memoranda in writing to the Clerk.

59. There have now been several experiments with on-line consultation on an *ad hoc* basis, both by select committees and by all-party groups. They have generally been successful and have proved effective as a way of engaging members of the public in the work that we do and of giving a voice to those who would otherwise be excluded. We urge select committees and joint committees considering draft legislation to make on-line consultation a more regular aspect of their work.

26 Q 105.

27 Archives of previous on-line consultations and forums, together with any current live consultations, can be found at www.democracyforum.org.uk.

28 At www.tellparliament.net/modernisation.

A Commons newsletter

60. In response to our survey, Members told us that constituents often inquired about recent or forthcoming business in the House,²⁹ and the suggestion that a short Commons newsletter should be available for circulation to constituents was generally welcomed. Journalists also told us that they would welcome more straightforward guidance on the business of the House, in the form of e-mail alerts:

‘You could have an e-mail on Friday prepared by a press officer saying, “Here is the business for the following week”’.³⁰

61. The principal digest of information about the work of the House of Commons which is available to the general public is the Weekly Information Bulletin (WIB). This is published every Saturday, and contains a comprehensive list of the previous week’s proceedings, a list of the business for the forthcoming week, and provisional details for the week after that. It also includes details of forthcoming select committee meetings, as well as a great deal of other material such as comprehensive information about the progress on each Bill in the current Session of Parliament, a list of certain types of paper laid each week and information about the state of the parties. The Bulletin typically runs to 50 or so pages.

62. The WIB is an extremely useful document for Members, journalists and officials, as well as those outside Parliament who already take a close interest in our proceedings. However, it does not meet the needs of the average citizen: it contains too much information, it is extremely dense and it contains very little explanatory material. This is no criticism of the Weekly Bulletin—it was never intended or designed to meet these needs. It is a valuable document in its own right and we would wish to see it continue to be produced.

63. However, there is a case for a simpler, more user-friendly document that provides less information but is more accessible to the general reader, as well as for media purposes. This might also be of use to Members. Such a document might run to only a few pages, and include only the information about business for the previous and forthcoming week. But it should also incorporate some explanatory material so that the reader can find out, for example, what is meant by ‘remaining stages’ of a Bill and what an adjournment debate is. **We recommend that the House make available to those interested in receiving the information (by post, e-mail or other convenient method of communication) a weekly newsletter. Aimed at the general, non-specialist reader, it should summarise the business of the previous week and set out forthcoming business for the following week. In due course, it may be possible to extend this service to allow for communication of other information by e-mail (such as the daily list of papers available in the Vote Office) and regular, subject-based updates for which users could subscribe. A printed form of the newsletter should be made available to visitors at various points around the Parliamentary Estate, including the bookshop. Electronically, it should occupy a prominent position on or near the front page of the Parliamentary website.**

29 84% rated the frequency that constituents inquired about the business of the House at 3 or higher on a 5-point scale.

30 Peter Riddell, Q 22. See also Q 40.

Information for young people

64. Members of the UK Youth Parliament and Professor Stephen Coleman suggested to us that the House should provide a separate website for young people. The educational website, explore.parliament.uk, is an excellent educational tool, which ties in with the National Curriculum and enables young people to learn about how Parliament works; it is not designed to provide up-to-date information about the business currently before the House. The main website, www.parliament.uk, is rather dry, and there is not much there to appeal to young people.

65. **We recommend that, as development of the website progresses, the House authorities, in consultation with young people, develop the website in a form which is more accessible to them.** This should not involve an extension of the educational site, but a reorganisation of the main site which draws attention to the issues Parliament is currently dealing with which are likely to be of special interest to young people—education and training, for example—in a way that is lively and accessible.

5 Visitors to the Parliamentary Estate

66. People visit the Parliamentary Estate for a variety of reasons: to meet their MP or take part in an organised lobby, to attend other events such as meetings of all-party groups, to see the architecture and history of the Palace of Westminster and to see Parliament at work. It is important that visitors are made to feel welcome in the Parliamentary Estate whatever their reason for coming here. For most purposes, the needs of all visitors are the same: efficient security screening, clear signage, staff on-hand to direct them to where they want to go. However, **to the extent that there is conflict between the needs of different groups of visitors, we believe that the House should, as a matter of principle, give priority to the needs of those who come to see and participate in the work of Parliament over those whose primary interest is the Palace of Westminster as a historical building.** During the 2003–04 financial year, 136,156 people visited the galleries of the House and 105,529 took part in tours organised by Members of Parliament.³¹

67. That is not to say that we should not do everything we can to facilitate tours of the Palace with a historical and architectural emphasis. The Palace of Westminster is a magnificent building—part of a UNESCO world heritage site—maintained at the expense of the UK taxpayer.³² Although it is also a working building, it is right that those who pay for its upkeep should have every reasonable opportunity to see it. But it is more important, we believe, that visitors are given an opportunity to see Parliament as a working institution, one which long pre-dates most of its current premises.

31 Some people will have visited the gallery and toured the building during the same visit. The figures do not include people who visit the House on business or privately (to meet their MP or attend a select committee meeting, for example).

32 The site also includes Westminster Abbey and St Margaret's Church.

A Visitor Centre

68. We have previously emphasised the need to make the Parliamentary Estate more welcoming to visitors and welcomed proposals for a visitor centre.³³ There is growing concern that, despite recent improvements, the provision made for visitors to Parliament remains inadequate. This was reflected very strongly in the discussions we had with participants in the Hansard Society's Connecting Communities with Parliament programme, who consistently argued that the arrangements for receiving visitors to the Palace were unwelcoming and even actively off-putting. The number of people who come to the Houses of Parliament in person is small compared to the number who have dealings with Parliament in other ways, by writing to their MP, for example, or visiting the parliamentary website. But it is nonetheless important that visitors who come here are made to feel welcome in what is, after all, their Parliament.

69. Major improvements, such as the opening of the Jubilee Café and the establishment of a Central Tours Office, have been made recently, but facilities for receiving visitors are still regarded by many as unsatisfactory. In particular, there is no special provision for the welcome for members of the public, and no facility for an exhibition or display which will put the building and its history in the context of Parliament's role and importance as the expression of our democracy.

70. There is little doubt that the establishment of an interpretive Visitors Centre and the upgrading of the existing screening facilities, currently located in St Stephen's Entrance, would help significantly to improve visitors' experience of Parliament. The National Assembly for Wales has an impressive Visitors Centre in the nearby Pierhead Building and the Scottish Parliament has a similar facility in the Committee Chambers, with integrated visitor facilities planned for the Holyrood buildings. However, the Palace of Westminster is a crowded building; there is simply no free space in which a Visitors Centre could be established without displacing current users. Many of the House's core services are located in relatively distant outbuildings at present. Likewise, free space in the surrounding area, which the House might acquire for visitor purposes, is extremely scarce.

Background

71. In July 2002, the Group on Information for the Public (GIP) commissioned, on behalf of the House of Commons Commission, a firm of consultants, Haley Sharpe, and a firm of conservation architects, Purcell Miller Tritton and Partners, to conduct an initial feasibility study for a Visitor Centre for Parliament. The consultants' Report identified several options for a new Visitor Centre but recommended a scheme that would combine

- a) a security and reception building at the north end of Cromwell Green,
- b) a Visitor Centre and shop in the side rooms off Westminster Hall, and
- c) the option of providing additional facilities in a new building in Victoria Tower Gardens.

³³ Second Report from the Committee, Session 2001–02, *Modernisation of the House of Commons: A Reform Programme*, HC 1168, paragraphs 19 & 20.

72. The relevant Domestic Committees in the Commons and Lords were asked to consider the recommendations. Reaction was mixed. The proposed new reception building was generally welcomed, not least because it would involve the removal of the intrusive security scanners currently at the south end of Westminster Hall and would improve the speed and security of entry.

73. However, the proposed two-storey Visitor Centre and shop in Westminster Hall involved displacing the UK Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (British Group), and the loss of the meeting rooms there (the 'W rooms'). These proposals met heavy resistance.

74. The Consultants were therefore asked to undertake a second study focussing on the options for a Visitor Centre outside the Estate, and the possibilities of siting a Visitor Centre adjacent to Westminster Hall with the displacement of fewer existing services. The House of Commons Commission also asked the Consultants to develop the idea, included in the first study, of a new reception and security building on Cromwell Green.

75. The Consultants produced a Stage 2 Feasibility Study in May 2003. In doing so, they responded to the criticism of the plans to displace the CPA UK branch and the IPU British Group and considered whether a more limited facility than was outlined in the first Report could be housed on a single floor. They concluded that within the existing building this would not provide enough space. They therefore examined extending the facilities on one level out on to Cromwell Green. Again space would be limited and this would have a significant effect on the view of the front of the Palace.

76. The second Feasibility Study also examined the possibilities of locating the Visitor Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens. Such an option would be attractive because of the additional space available but it is a very sensitive site. Agreement would need to be sought from the Royal Parks, Westminster City Council and English Heritage, and early discussions suggested this was unlikely to be forthcoming.

77. This led the House of Commons Commission, in agreement with the Lords House Committee, to the view that there was a need for a reassessment of the plans for visitor facilities. The work already undertaken by consultants would be used by a group of senior officials of both Houses to assist the Administration Committee and Accommodation and Works Committee in examining:

- a) what improved arrangements should be made for access to the building, suited to different types of visitors and consistent with the requirements of security;
- b) what range of facilities might be provided for the reception, information and education of visitors to Parliament;
- c) how excessive pressure on visitor facilities and interference with the working of Parliament could be avoided.

78. With the aid of the group of officials, the two Committees considered the consultants' proposals and developed recommendations. They published their Report in February 2004 and concluded that 'there was a compelling case for pressing ahead with a new reception and security building on Cromwell Green as a first step to improving facilities for

visitors'.³⁴ The Report explained how visitors would enter Parliament under the proposed arrangements and the benefits offered by the entry route through the new building.

79. The Committees noted the potential along the proposed entry route for some information on the work of Parliament. There would also be a staffed information kiosk near St. Stephen's Entrance and an information desk in Westminster Hall. Nevertheless, this would not provide the level of information and interpretative material envisaged in a full-scale Visitor Centre. The Committees recognised this but concluded that, within the limitations of the building, there was not a space available to accommodate the required facilities. The Committees' Report was approved on 12th May.

Conclusions

80. We welcome the work of the Administration and Accommodation and Works Committees and the House's endorsement of the proposals for the construction of the reception and security building.³⁵

81. We also note their advice that a full-scale Visitor Centre is not feasible within the Palace of Westminster. Work is continuing to identify an appropriate location near the Palace and the Domestic Committees are committed to a fuller study and further Report on this. **We recognise the several unique difficulties involved in establishing new visitor facilities near the Palace of Westminster, but urge that all possible options are explored.**

82. Our starting point is that any Visitor Centre project should have four main objectives:

- a) **it must provide a welcome to visitors;**
- b) **it must provide an interesting and friendly environment;**
- c) **it should make Parliament more accessible, allowing visitors to see at least something of what Parliament is and does without necessarily having to visit the galleries, committees or take a tour; and**
- d) **it must improve public understanding and knowledge of the work and role of Parliament.**

The new reception and security building will help to meet the first of these objectives; it will use visitor staff so that visitors' first contact with staff of the House will come from someone whose primary concern is to greet them and make them feel welcome. A major review of signage, currently underway, should also help to make the environment more welcoming. There may also be scope to improve the current facilities designed to meet the other three objectives but in our view the need for a dedicated Visitor Centre remains. Once the overdue improvement to Parliament's welcome and access has been addressed, attention can focus on meeting the other three

34 First Joint Report of the Accommodation and Works and Administration Committees, Session 2003–04 (HC 324), *Visitor Facilities: Access to Parliament*, paragraph 8.

35 The Debate on the proposals in the House took place on 22nd April and 11th May 2004. The Motion was agreed to by deferred Division on 12th May.

main objectives of the Visitor Centre Project through planning for a dedicated Visitor Centre.

Making visitors welcome

83. The establishment of a Visitors Centre is only one part of the solution to the wider problem of how we welcome visitors to the Parliamentary Estate—or fail to. Much progress has been made in this area, for example, with the establishment of information screens and a welcome desk in Central Lobby, but there is more that could be done. Several people commented on the increased security measures, including conspicuous armed police officers; but most recognised that in the current security climate this was a regrettable necessity. Despite current security considerations—perhaps all the more so because of them—visitors must be made to feel welcome in their Parliament.

84. Participants in the Hansard Society’s Connecting Communities with Parliament Programme suggested a number of ways in which visitors’ experience of the Parliamentary Estate could be improved for a very modest cost. The main proposals were:

- a) More staff on-hand specifically to welcome visitors, tell them what they could see and point them in the right direction, handing them a written guide, perhaps including a plan and an indication of what visitors were able to do.
- b) A sign at the entrance saying ‘Welcome to the Houses of Parliament’.
- c) Better signage in general, indicating such things as toilets, the Jubilee Café, the Grand Committee Room, Committee Corridor, etc.
- d) Improved queuing systems for the Gallery.
- e) The possibility of a ‘viewing gallery’ which would allow visitors to pass along the corridor at the back of the Gallery, seeing the House while it is sitting but not stopping to listen to the debate.

We welcome these practical suggestions and we commend them to the House authorities.

‘Strangers’

85. By convention, visitors to the House of Commons are referred to as ‘Strangers’.³⁶ The practice of ‘spying Strangers’ was abandoned in 1998,³⁷ and references to ‘Strangers’ have elsewhere been abandoned, for example, in the latest edition of *Erskine May*, the standard reference work on Parliamentary procedure.³⁸ But the word is still used in several Standing

36 The earliest reference in the Commons Journal to a Stranger appears to be 13th February 1575.

37 See Standing Order No. 163 and the Fourth Report from the Committee, Session 1997–98, *Conduct in the Chamber*, HC600, paragraphs 55–62.

38 McKay (Ed.), *Erskine May’s Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 23rd Edition (Butterworths—Lexis-Nexis, 2004). The term ‘strangers’ has been retained in the index in order to preserve continuity with earlier editions.

Orders, and in the names of various parts of the Palace of Westminster, such as the Strangers' Gallery, Strangers' Dining Room and Strangers' Bar.

86. The Oxford Dictionary defines a stranger, in the parliamentary sense, as 'one who is not a member or an official of the House and is present at its debates only on sufferance'. That is the last impression we should be wanting to give to people who exercise their democratic right to visit what is, after all, their Parliament and whose taxes pay for all that goes on here. The following comments from our on-line consultation are typical of what we were told by members of the public, both on-line and in person:

'The term "stranger" is wrong—why not simply "visitors' gallery"?...';

'It would seem logical for so-called "strangers" to be re-named either "visitors" or—even better—"guests"...'.³⁹

We recommend that the term 'Strangers' be no longer used in referring to visitors to the House of Commons.

Access to the Gallery when the House is sitting

87. We recognised, when we made our recommendations for the reform of the House's sitting hours, that making more use of the earlier part of the day by sitting in the mornings would restrict the time available for visitors to see the Chamber before the House sits. We therefore recommended the establishment of a revised Line of Route, which would allow visitors to see the Commons in session without causing any disruption to the Chamber.⁴⁰

88. For an experimental period last year, a viewing gallery was created, to allow visitors to see the House sitting without having to come into the gallery and take a seat. [This was in response to an earlier recommendation from this Committee.] The experiment was abandoned after only a short period, due to poor take-up. Nonetheless, when we asked them about it, 86% of Members favoured this idea.⁴¹

89. Since that experiment, a security screen has been installed at the front of the public gallery, on the advice of the security services and others. The installation of this screen provides an opportunity to revisit the question of tour groups passing through the gallery. It may be, for instance, that certain seats could be reserved for those on tours, allowing them to stop for a short time during their tour to see part of a debate. **We recommend that further consideration be given to ways in which groups of visitors touring the building might be able to pass through the gallery as part of a tour so that they are able to witness aspects of Parliament in action.**

Saturday opening

90. A number of ways are being considered in which the time available for tours of the Line of Route might be improved. They include opening earlier in the morning, running the

39 www.tellparliament.net/modernisation/.

40 Second Report from the Committee, Session 2001–02, *Modernisation of the House of Commons: A Reform Programme*, paragraph 20.

41 154 out of 179 respondents rated it 3 or higher on a 5-point scale.

tours on a fully commercial basis, as in the summer, and mixing Members' groups with paying groups. One of the more attractive suggestions is that the building should be open to the public at weekends, on the same commercial basis as it is in the summer. For an entrance fee of around £7 per head, people can book a tour in advance during the summer recess. The scheme breaks even as the entrance fee is set at a level which just allows the House to recoup the increased security, administration and other costs associated with opening the building to the public at a time when it would normally be closed and largely empty. In 2003, 86,806 people visited the House during the summer opening.

91. Saturday opening is attractive for two further reasons: it would allow people to visit the Houses of Parliament at a time which is convenient to them, rather than during the working week, and it would reduce the impact of visitors on the work of Members and others. There is a clear demand for Saturday opening, as the summer tours, which run on six days a week, have demonstrated. **We recommend that the Administration Committee consider Saturday opening of the Line of Route—for Members' parties as well as paying groups—to assess its feasibility.** There must be sufficient lead time to allow proper advertising so that Parliament does not sustain a financial loss due to poor initial take-up. **We further recommend that the Administration Committee consider the feasibility of allowing Members to book guided tours of the Line of Route throughout the Summer opening on a similar basis to that on which they can book tours on sitting days.**

Standing committees

92. We were interested, though not surprised, to hear from participants in the Hansard Society programme that, although they were able to follow proceedings in the Chamber and Westminster Hall, and in select committees, reasonably easily, many of them found proceedings in standing committee utterly baffling. There are a number of reasons for this, the principal among which is that the business of scrutinising a bill clause by clause, considering amendments and new clauses (which are usually grouped in such a way that amendments may be debated long before the point at which they occur in the bill is reached), sometimes under an order of consideration which means that the committee considers different parts of the bill in a different order from that in which they occur, is inherently complex. Several of the participants recognised this fact and remarked that they were pleased to see what looked like thorough scrutiny of legislation, even if it was not readily apparent to them exactly how the process worked.

93. There is also the question of the papers needed to follow proceedings in standing committee. The observer needs not only the bill itself, but the explanatory notes to the bill, the amendment paper and the chairman's provisional selection, which shows which amendments the chairman proposes for debate, and in what order. It can be very difficult for Members, never mind visitors and other interested parties, to follow what is going on in a standing committee. One needs to be able to cross-refer constantly between the amendment paper, the selection list and the bill in order to understand what is being discussed. Even then it may be difficult to understand the impact of an amendment as the explanatory notes cover only the original wording in the bill.

94. It may be that proceedings in committee are inevitably complicated, but at present we do nothing to make them more comprehensible. **We recommend that the Procedure**

Committee consider how better to present the information from the bill, explanatory notes, amendment paper and selection list, either on paper or electronically, so that when an amendment is being debated Members and visitors can see the original clause, the clause as amended, and an explanatory note on both, so that the issue under debate is clear to all.

95. In select committee meetings, and in Westminster Hall, a guide is given to members of the public explaining what is going on, including a diagram of the room, a brief description of proceedings and, in the case of select committees, a few words about the inquiry. **We recommend that a guide for visitors to standing committees on bills should also be produced.** We envisage that most of this guide would be a standard explanation of standing committee procedure, which would not vary from one committee to the next, but each should contain a few words about the bill the committee is considering.

6 Public Petitions

96. Petitions provide a means for members of the public to have their voice heard in Parliament. During the 1997 Parliament, the House received a total of 321 petitions (an average of about 80 per year), although the number of petitions presented in a Session has varied significantly over the past ten years or so, from 2,651 in 1992–93 to just 36 in the 2000–01 Session.

97. The text of each petition is printed as a supplement to the Votes and Proceedings, and a copy is sent to the relevant Government department. If the Minister chooses to reply to the petition, the reply (known as ‘observations’) is also printed in the Vote. There is no *requirement* for the Government to reply to a petition; of the 602 petitions presented between 1994–95 and 2001–02, 65% (394) received a reply.

98. In Scotland, petitions are submitted directly to the Public Petitions Committee. The Committee may then forward the petition to another body for further consideration—usually another committee of the Parliament but sometimes the Scottish Executive—consider the petition itself, or recommend a debate on it in the plenary session. Of the 137 petitions considered in the 2001–02 Parliamentary Year, at 17 meetings of the Committee, 45 were referred to subject committees.

99. Very little is currently done with petitions to the House of Commons. Most are read on the Floor of the House, but at a time of day when they are likely to receive little public attention, even under the new sitting hours. All are printed, but the supplements to the Votes and Proceedings are not widely read, even by the standards of Parliamentary publications. Many or most receive a response from the Government, but for a sizeable minority of petitions nothing at all happens. Many relate to issues which are already clearly under discussion in Parliament in some way. Nevertheless, **we believe that there is a case for the House to do more with public petitions which, if handled correctly, represent a potentially significant avenue for communication between the public and Parliament.**

100. **We recommend that the Liaison Committee and Procedure Committee consider a process whereby public petitions should automatically stand referred to the relevant select committee. It would then be for the committee to decide whether or not to conduct an inquiry into the issues raised, or to take them into account in the context of**

a current or forthcoming inquiry. In many cases, the committee may wish simply to ask the Government for a response to the petition, which could then be sent to the petitioners and subsequently published, perhaps in an annual or biennial report on petitions, or perhaps in its annual report to the Liaison Committee. In other cases, a petition might be taken into account as part of an inquiry which the committee is already undertaking or plans to undertake in the near future. In some cases, the committee might decide to reject a petition. The most common example of this, we believe, would be petitions which ask the House to address matters which are properly the responsibility of some other body. Petitions relating to court judgements, for example, or to local authority planning decisions, are not uncommon,⁴² and the continued presentation of such petitions might serve to raise unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved by petitioning the House. We do not envisage that any new proposals for referring petitions to a select committee should replace the current arrangements whereby petitions are printed with the Vote and may receive observations from the Government.

Rules governing the submission of petitions

101. Petitions must be specifically and respectfully addressed to the House of Commons and end with a suitable closing phrase.⁴³ Each signatory must include his or her address and the wording must be ‘respectful, decorous and temperate’. Each Petition must contain a request to the House of Commons which is within its competence to grant. A further requirement is that the petition should be hand-written, with no interlineations, deletions or insertions. This rule applies only to the main page of the petition; on subsequent sheets for signatures it may be typed or printed, and need only contain the part of the petition containing the request to the House.

102. The requirement that petitions be in manuscript derives from a Resolution of 1656, which required ‘no private Petition, to be directed to the Parliament, to be printed before the same read in the House’.⁴⁴ This was against the background of the abundance of political pamphlets against the Commonwealth, when the common hangman’s major duty was to burn those pamphlets condemned by Parliament. It was also, of course, long before the days when printing and typescript ceased to be reserved for published documents and became a normal mode of private written communication.

103. In 1992, the Procedure Committee considered this requirement as part of a wider review of public petitions and recommended that it should be retained.⁴⁵ Since that Report was produced, more than a decade ago, the use of word processors has risen tremendously; the proportion of households with a computer has more than doubled.⁴⁶ Many, if not most people now use the keyboard in preference to the pen as the usual instrument of written

42 Of 53 Petitions presented in first 86 sitting days of the current Session, 12 related to local authority matters.

43 Petitions usually begin ‘To the House of Commons’ and end ‘And the Petitioners remain, etc.’. The more traditional form, which was compulsory until 1993 and is still sometimes used, begins ‘To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled’ and ends ‘And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.’.

44 CJ (1651–59) 427.

45 Fourth Report from the Procedure Committee, Session 1991–92, *Public Petitions*, HC 286, paragraphs 17–19.

46 Between 1991–92 and 2001–02, the proportion of households with a home computer rose from 21% to 49%: *Social Trends No. 30*, Office for National Statistics, 2000, Figure 13.2, p. 210 and *Social Trends No. 33*, Office for National Statistics, 2003, Figure 13.13, p. 230.

communication. It is therefore increasingly difficult to justify the continuing requirement that petitions be in manuscript, which appears archaic and imposes a minor additional labour on petitioners.⁴⁷

104. We recommend that the House accept petitions in both typescript and manuscript, although the present restriction against interlineations, deletions and insertions should be retained so that it is clear that the wording of the petition has not been changed without the petitioner's knowledge. The top sheet—the authoritative copy of the petition—should continue to be distinguished from sheets of additional signatures by the Member presenting it signing in the top right-hand corner, as is the current practice.

7 The House of Commons and the media

105. Effective communication about Parliament in the media is central to improving public interest in Parliament. In conducting this inquiry, we have benefited from many suggestions from journalists and many of our recommendations reflect their suggestions—for example, the redesign of the website—will make it easier for journalists to get the information they need more quickly and efficiently and the recommendation for a simpler weekly newsletter in addition to the Weekly Information Bulletin emerged from discussions with journalists. However, the way in which the House approaches its direct communications with the media is also important in influencing the way in which the media cover Parliament.

Background

106. The media coverage of Parliament has changed significantly in recent years. Dedicated Parliamentary pages had disappeared from most newspapers by the 1980s and vanished entirely by the 1990s. Dr Ralph Negrine of the University of Leicester told us that this was in line with a general decline in political coverage. In one three-week period in 1963, a survey of broadsheet newspapers found around 250 political items; in the same period in 1996, there were only 171 political items. The focus of political coverage had also moved away from Parliament, to take in lobby groups and other political actors.⁴⁸

107. Various factors have contributed to the reduction in Parliamentary reporting. As newspapers have grown in size, they have come to cover a wider range of subjects—such as new technology and consumer affairs, for example—which means that a smaller proportion of the paper is available for political coverage (though not necessarily a smaller volume of print in absolute terms). Television and radio provide forums outside Parliament where political actors, including MPs and Ministers, can debate issues of public interest. Newspapers feel less need to reproduce speeches when they are broadcast on television. On the other hand, many journalists argue that the public are simply not interested in reading substantive reports of debates in the House of Commons, except for a few of the most important debates.

⁴⁷ Or in some cases on Members and their staff who must transcribe typewritten petitions before presentation.

⁴⁸ We held an informal meeting with Dr Negrine on 5 February 2003.

108. Whatever the reasons for the decline in media coverage of Parliament, it is clear that the House can no longer expect to receive a certain amount of media coverage as of right. Parliamentary proceedings must now compete with other potential news stories for coverage. It is therefore important for the House to take a more organised, professional and strategic approach to its relations with the media. This is an area where significant advances have been made in recent months.

Recent developments in the House's media relations

109. This is another area where there has been a great deal of recent activity. The post of Communications Adviser was created in October 2000, based in the Office of the Clerk, to provide media and communications advice and support to staff and Members on issues relating to the work of the House, and to co-ordinate the House-wide development of media and communications strategy. A Media Adviser to the House of Commons Commission has been employed on a part time consultancy basis since December 2001.

110. In October 2003 two further posts were created: a Communications Assistant now supports the work of the Communications Adviser and a Select Committee Media Officer (SCMO) provides communications advice and support to six select committees: Constitutional Affairs, Defence, Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, International Development and Public Administration. This followed the earlier review of select committee resources carried out by the National Audit Office.

111. From September 2004, two more SCMO posts will be created so that all departmental select committees will have their own dedicated media and communications specialist.⁴⁹

112. An initial media strategy for select committees was agreed in 2002, including improvements to the distribution arrangements for select committee publications, wider use of substantive press releases summarising the contents of reports, the development of publicity plans for individual inquiries and reports, improved co-ordination and timing of publications, dissemination of best-practice guidance among committee staff and the production of standard guidance on all aspects of media liaison work. This work continues to develop.

Co-ordinating communications work

113. Alongside the developments in the House's media relations, work on external communications has continued to develop in other parts of the House. We have discussed much of it in this Report, such as the Education Unit and the website, but there are also other areas, such as the House of Commons Information Office (HCIO), established over 25 years ago. The Office answers tens of thousands of inquiries from members of the public every year, by telephone, letter and e-mail.⁵⁰ The Bookshop, which occupies a prime site at the corner of Parliament Street and Bridge Street, has great potential as an accessible information point for the House of Commons.

49 That is, the committees established by Standing Order No. 152.

50 78,000 inquiries in 2003–03. The number of inquiries has declined significantly since the establishment of the website.

114. One of the main challenges facing the House's communications strategy is that the current provision is fragmented. The Education Unit and the HCIO are part of the Commons Library; the Select Committee Media Officers are part of the Committee Office; the Communications Adviser is based in the Office of the Clerk; the Media Adviser is attached to the Commission; the Bookshop is a part of the Vote Office which comes under the Department of the Clerk of the House; and numerous staff across several departments have responsibility for the content of the website. Staff with detailed responsibility for the main Parliamentary website, and the Director of Parliamentary Broadcasting, operate for both Houses. Meanwhile, the Official Report (Hansard) is obviously crucial to the total communication effort.

115. The House of Commons has a great asset in the Bookshop in Parliament Street which provides a point where people can go for information without having to go into the Parliamentary Estate. This is an important facility and we feel that greater use can be made of it to help Parliament connect with the public. One of the benefits of the better co-ordination of the House's media, educational and communications resources would be that the Bookshop could serve a broader range of uses, acting as an information centre and press office as well as a bookshop.

116. In order to co-ordinate these activities better, the House's Board of Management has established the Group on Information for the Public (GIP), a group of officials which includes a representative of the House of Lords. Its principal activities are:

- a) planning and coordinating the provision of information to the public on behalf of the Board of Management;
- b) reviewing the way in which information is provided to the public, making recommendations for change and proposals for new initiatives; and
- c) developing and coordinating a strategic approach to public information issues.

117. GIP normally meets every fortnight and its minutes are available for other staff to see on the parliamentary intranet. It is developing a specific communications strategy which prioritises work around two key themes: the distinction between Parliament and Government, and Parliament's scrutiny function, by which the executive is held to account. These themes were identified following a survey of visitors to Parliament, and the wider public, in 2002. They inform, and in some cases drive, the House's public communications wherever possible. Examples of this include:

- a) the strong emphasis on the role and work of select committees, and the provision of up-to-date news about current inquiries, in plans for further medium-term improvements to the website;
- b) giving clear priority to expanding the quality and range of select committee coverage in developing the House's media liaison work; and
- c) focusing the promotion of the expanded webcasting service primarily on select committees.

118. Several people suggested that there should be a central press office, along the same lines as most Government departments. While we see some merit in this proposal, there

are inherent difficulties with the use by the House of press officers in the same role as Government press officers. The House of Commons does not have a continuing policy or unanimous view on any matters of public policy; the House's communications strategy must reflect the fact that the House consists of 659 individual MPs, representing numerous political parties. This means that the kind of pro-active briefing which Government press offices engage in, intended to promote the Government's position in the media and, through them, to the general public, would in most cases be inappropriate for a House of Commons Press Office to engage in.

119. There is one obvious area where a consensus view could be promoted in the media: that of select committee reports. Where a committee of the House has reached a view on a subject and reported on it, it is right that the committee should have the resources to communicate its views effectively to the press. That is part of the reason why the development of the press office function is concentrated in the Committee Office and the Clerk's Department.

120. One of the current difficulties is that those seeking information about the work of the House must go to a variety of different sources for it. Likewise, as the House seeks to disseminate information more actively, it is done in a piecemeal fashion so that journalists in particular sometimes feel that they are being bombarded with information from all directions. George Pascoe-Watson of *The Sun* told us that on the day he gave evidence to us, he had counted around 40 different press notices from different parts of the House in the Press gallery. Clearly, if information is provided to the press in this way, it is easy for journalists to miss what he described as 'the one pearl' buried in it.⁵¹

121. Many of the functions carried out by press offices in other organisations are already carried out in different parts of the House of Commons. The HCIO, for example, will answer factual queries (even quite complex ones) whether from members of the general public or from journalists. But in many organisations of a comparable size, the parts of the organisation which are intended to improve communication with the public are grouped in the same directorate. The National Assembly for Wales, for example, has a single Public Information and Education Service. **We welcome the progress that has been made in recent years to improve the House's communications strategy, in particular the establishment of the posts of Communications Adviser and Media Adviser and the Select Committee Media Officers. The Group on Information for the Public has likewise played a vital role. But we believe that there is scope for greater co-ordination of the House's media and communications resources. We therefore recommend the establishment of a central press office for the House of Commons, to take a more pro-active role in promoting the House and its work.**

122. GIP is composed of senior officials, all of whom have other duties, and it meets only once a fortnight. It has responsibility for a huge range of issues as varied as visitor facilities, telephone services, exhibition planning, the website, works of art and signage. While GIP is very successful at planning at the strategic level, it is not the appropriate body to oversee the day-to-day co-ordination of the House's outward-looking activity, nor was it established for that purpose. **We recommend that the Board of Management and the House of Commons Commission urgently consider whether there is scope for further**

improving the co-ordination of the House's media, educational and communications resources and planning, with effective Member oversight and close liaison with appropriate officials and Members of the House of Lords.

Promoting Hansard

123. Steve Richards of *The Independent* told us that *Hansard* was a good source of stories for journalists, but that few bothered to read it on a daily basis. One way in which *Hansard* might be made more accessible is by the provision of a more comprehensive index for the daily part, identifying which Members spoke in a debate as well as the subject of each question, etc. The current contents page provides only subject headings and column numbers. Technical changes within the Department of the Official Report mean that such an index will be easier to produce automatically or semi-automatically: it is envisaged that the House-wide move to data structuring through the use of Extensible Markup Language (XML) and the Official Report's move to camera-ready copy, both of which are projected to be completed in the next two to three years, would make the production of a simple index a fairly straightforward matter. **We recommend that the Department of the Official Report aim to produce a simple index to the daily part of Hansard once the necessary technological changes have been seen through.**

124. Elinor Goodman of Channel 4 News told us that

‘if you could have Hansard within an hour or two it would make our lives a lot easier because if you are ... trying to use a bit of Parliament sound it sometimes takes a long time to find it.’⁵²

Other journalists shared the view that making Hansard available earlier would help to encourage reporting of business in the Chamber, as well as improving accuracy. Reports are currently available for Members to check an hour and a half after they have made their speech and they are sent to the printer on a three-hour rolling deadline. Only MPs may see Hansard before it is published the following morning, and they may only see their own speeches for the purpose of checking accuracy. The text may not be taken out of the Hansard offices.

125. It would be of great assistance to journalists if Hansard were available on the same day. It would also be beneficial for Members, who would have the opportunity to see other Members' speeches, and possibly to the wider public. **We recommend that the Hansard report of a debate should be posted on the internet at the same time as it is sent to the printer, to be replaced with the published version the following day.**

The Press Gallery

126. Consideration should be given to allowing journalists to bring laptop computers into the Press Gallery.

8 Communication between Members and their constituents

127. The primary thread running through this inquiry, and the major focus of this Report, has been the interaction between the public and Parliament as an institution. We were also encouraged, however, to consider some of the issues relating to direct contact between individual MPs and their constituents.

128. The House of Commons has strict rules on the use of direct mail by Members. Members may not use the House of Commons pre-paid envelopes for unsolicited mailings, but may pay for mailings out of their Incidental Expenses Provision (IEP). Circulars funded in this way must not be used for business or commercial activities, for fundraising, surveys, to encourage people to join a political party or for election campaigning.⁵³ In response to our survey, nearly half of Members thought that the rules on mailings were not sufficiently clear.⁵⁴ Circulars include the annual and Parliamentary Reports which are now produced by many Members but they can also include ‘standard letters’ which are in routine use by many Members, cards listing dates and locations of surgeries and other non-partisan material. It may on occasion be appropriate to distribute these items more widely, rather than only sending them in response to constituents’ letters.

129. The prohibition on using the House’s postal services for political campaigning, fundraising or business correspondence is entirely proper. Any changes to the rules should be aimed at improving clarity and also, where appropriate, opportunities for Members to communicate to constituents matters relating to the business of the House, with no relaxation of the rules prohibiting party-political content. It is essential that facilities provided to Members to communicate with their constituents should not be available for use in a way which would tend to promote the interests of the incumbent MP at election time.

130. The Review Body on Senior Salaries (SSRB) is currently conducting its triennial review of Members’ allowances, including the Incidental Expenses Provision, and is expected to make recommendations about the adequacy of the IEP. We understand that the SSRB has received representations on the need for better facilities for Members to communicate with their constituents, among other things. The question of the level of the IEP and the uses to which it may be put also falls within the remit of the newly-established House of Commons Members Estimate Committee.⁵⁵ These are matters to which we might return in the fullness of time, once other bodies have had an opportunity to examine them.

53 Details are set out in the Department of Finance and Administration Factsheet, *Guidance for Members of Parliament on publications funded from the Incidental Expenses Provision*.

54 83 out of 177 respondents rated the clarity of the rules at 3 or below on a scale of 1 to 5.

55 Standing Order No. 152D.

Formal minutes

Wednesday 26 May 2004

Members present:

Mr Peter Hain, in the Chair

Ann Coffey	Joan Ruddock
Mr Oliver Heald	Martin Salter
Mr David Kidney	Richard Shepherd
Martin Linton	Mr Paul Tyler
Mr Patrick McLoughlin	Sir Nicholas Winterton
Mr Peter Pike	

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report (*Connecting Parliament with the Public*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 131 read and agreed to.

Annexes agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report from the Committee to the House.

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

Ordered, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (Select committees (reports)) be applied to the Report.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 16 June at 9.30 am.]

Witnesses

Wednesday 25 February 2004

Page

Ms Elinor Goodman, Political Editor, Channel 4 News, **Mr Peter Riddell**, *The Times*,
Mr George Pascoe-Watson, *The Sun* and **Mr Michael White**, Political Editor,
The Guardian

Ev 1

Wednesday 24 March 2004

Mrs Carol Devon, Director of Access and Information and **Ms Rosemary Everett**,
 Head of Participation Services, Scottish Parliament

Ev 20

Baroness Hamwee, Chair, **Ms Samantha Heath**, Deputy Chair, **Mr Richard Horsman**,
 Director, Secretariat and **Mr Edward Welsh**, Head of Media, London Assembly

Ev 26

Professor Stephen Coleman, Visiting Professor in e-Democracy at the
 Oxford Internet Institute

Ev 30

Wednesday 19 May 2004

Mr Duncan Cullimore, School Improvement Officer (14–19), Lewisham Local Education
 Authority; and **Ms Chris Weeds**, Parliamentary Education Officer

Ev 39

List of written evidence

Scottish Parliament	Ev 18
London Assembly	Ev 24
Professor Stephen Coleman	Ev 28
Mr Duncan Cullimore, Lewisham Local Education Authority	Ev 35
Ms Clare Ettinghausen, Director, Hansard Society	Ev 47
Mr Paul Whiteley	Ev 48
Equal Opportunities Commission	Ev 51
David Winnick MP	Ev 52
Jackie Lawrence MP	Ev 53
John Austin MP	Ev 54
Transport and General Workers Union	Ev 54
ePolitix.com	Ev 55
Mr Victor Launert, House of Commons Visitor Service Manager	Ev 57
Mr Ian Harris, Clerk, Australian House of Representatives	Ev 57
Mr Jeremy Thompson	Ev 60
Mr Allan Murfet	Ev 62
Mr Richard Ware, Web Centre Project Board	Ev 63
Mr Paul Silk, National Assembly for Wales	Ev 65
Mr Peter Knowles	Ev 66
Mr Andrew Sparrow, <i>Daily Telegraph</i>	Ev 68
Information TV	Ev 70
Mr James Paton	Ev 72
Hansard Society	Ev 73
David Lepper MP	Ev 75

Annex A

Conduct of the Inquiry

The Committee consulted very widely during the course of the inquiry. It held informal discussions with numerous officials of the House, including representatives of the Group on Information for the Public, the Education Unit, the Office of the Clerk of the House, the Serjeant at Arms, the Director of Parliamentary Broadcasting, the Visitors Manager and the Committee Office. It also spoke informally to Professor Stephen Coleman of the Oxford Internet Institute, Dr Ralph Negrine of the University of Leicester, Steve Richards of *The Independent*, Peter Knowles and Fran Unsworth of BBC Parliament and Martin Vogel and James Cronin of the BBC's iCAN website, members of the UK Youth Parliament and representatives of the Plain English Campaign.

On 3 and 4 March 2003, the Committee visited the Scottish Parliament in order, among other things, to see how they approached issues relating to connecting with the public, including the work of their Petitions Committee and the involvement of the public in the legislative process through the committee system. On 8 March 2004, it visited the National Assembly for Wales (NAW), where it saw the Assembly at the Pierhead—the NAW's visitor and education centre—as well as discussing the work of the Assembly's Public Information and Education Service. The Committee also met three groups of students, from Bassaleg School, Newport; Coleg Gwent; and Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni, Bargoed. The Committee is grateful to the Presiding Officers and officials of the Parliament and the Assembly for their kind hospitality and their contribution to our inquiry.

On 26 January 2004, the Committee visited Birmingham City Council to find out about their devolution and localisation programme, Going Local; they are grateful to David Maxted, the Strategic Director of Local Services, and his colleagues at the City Council for their informative briefing.

The Hansard Society has been closely involved with this inquiry. Its Connecting Communities with Parliament Programme selects a group of around a dozen people from a single Parliamentary constituency then brings them to Westminster for the day to see the House sitting, a select committee, a standing committee and a debate in Westminster Hall. This is followed by a debriefing discussion a few weeks later. The Committee participated in the debriefing discussions with two groups of participants, from Birmingham Edgbaston and from Reading West. This gave a very useful insight into the experiences of visitors to the Palace of Westminster, as well as participants' views on a wider range of issues relating to Parliament. The Society also ran an on-line consultation for the Committee, during the month of March 2004, at www.tellparliament.net/modernisation.

The Committee held an open public meeting at Reading Civic Centre on 23rd February 2004, which was attended by around 60 people. The discussion was wide-ranging and covered such issues as citizenship education, public perception of politicians, Parliament and the media and the accessibility of parliamentary proceedings.

The following is a complete list of those who were consulted during the inquiry (not including all those who came to the public meeting in Reading). Those who gave formal

evidence are indicated with a dagger (†) and their evidence is published at pages Ev 1–46. The Committee is most grateful to all those who participated in the inquiry.

House of Commons

Rt Hon Michael Martin MP, Speaker

Archie Cameron, Director of Operations, Department of Finance and Administration

Rob Clements, Director of Library Research Services and Chair of the Group on Information for the Public (GIP)

Sir Michael Cummins, Serjeant at Arms

Victor Launert, Visitors Manager

David Lepper MP, Chairman of the Broadcasting Committee

Barbara Long, Director of Parliamentary Broadcasting

Liz Parratt, Communications Adviser, Office of the Clerk of the House

Robert Twigger, Director of Parliamentary and Reference Services, House of Commons Library and a Member of the Group on Information for the Public

Chris Weeds, Parliamentary Education Officer†

Robert Wilson, Principal Clerk of Select Committees

Philip Wright, Assistant Serjeant at Arms

Scottish Parliament

Rt Hon Sir David Steel KBE MSP, Presiding Officer

George Reid MSP and Murray Tosh MSP, Deputy Presiding Officers

Public Petitions Committee

John McAllion MSP, Convener

Helen Eadie MSP, Deputy Convener

Dorothy Grace-Elder MSP

Officials

Paul Grice, Clerk and Chief Executive

Leslie Beddie, Director of Communications Technology

Carol Devon, Director of Access and Information†

Rosemary Everett, Head of Participation Services†

Ken Hughes, Head of the Chamber Office

Ann Nelson, Legal Adviser

Elizabeth Watson, Head of Committee Office

National Assembly for Wales

Assembly Members

Dr John Marek AM, Deputy Presiding Officer

William Graham AM

Tamsin Dunwoody-Kneafsey AM

Jenny Randerson AM

Officials

Paul Silk, Clerk of the Assembly

Brian Davidge, Head of ICT

Nerys Evans, Corporate Services Division

Andrew George, Head of Chamber Secretariat

John Grimes, Clerk of the Economic Development and Transport Committee

Gill Lambert, Head of Public Information and Education

Gwen Parry, Director of the Assembly Communication Service

Karin Phillips, Director of Members' Research and Committee Services

Students

The Committee met around 12 students from:

Archbishop McGrath RC School, Bridgend;

Bassaleg School, Newport;

Coleg Gwent; and

Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni, Bargoed

The London Assembly†

Members

Baroness Hamwee, Chair

Samantha Heath, Deputy Chair

Officials

Mr Richard Horsman, Director, Secretariat

Mr Edward Welsh, Head of Media Relations (Assembly)

Birmingham City Council

Andrew Kerr, Director of Performance Improvement

David Maxted, Strategic Director of Local Services

Tony Smith, Policy Unit

Ed Whitton, Local Involvement, Local Action Team

Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government

Clare Ettinghausen, Director

Connecting Communities with Parliament Programme

Caroline Gordon & Declan McHugh, Programme Organisers

Participants from Birmingham Edgbaston

Vicky Hook, Women Acting in Today's Society (WAITS)

Sarah Bookey, Soroptimist International

Martin Clee, Mencap

Paul Fullwood, Rail Passengers' Committee

Jeremy Thompson, St John's Church

Ruby Osei, Moseley and District Churches Housing Association

Dawn McNab, WAITS

Simon Field, Birmingham and Solihull Connexions Service

Jackie Grant, Birmingham Community Empowerment Network (B:CEN)

Dave Burton, Birmingham City Housing

Participants from Reading West

Joe Dray, Parent Governor, Prospect School

Nick Harbourne, Chair, Reading Voluntary Sector Forum
 Liz Herbert, Reading Neighbourhood Watch Manager
 Matthew Hilt, Reading University Campaigns Forum
 Gordon Hewson, Vice Chair of Governors, Prospect School
 Bob Jones, Chair, University of the Third Age
 Jean Meek, Whitley Wood Neighbourhood Watch
 Kevin Pearce, Virgin Trains
 Katherine Tatner, Regional Manager, Virgin Trains
 Dorothy Townsend, Reading CRE and Reading Age Concern
 Joan Turton, Mothertongue and Reading Age Concern

United Kingdom Youth Parliament (UKYP)

Kate Parish, Development Co-ordinator
 Shirin Ali MYP, Kingston upon Thames
 Philippe Chiarella MYP, Leicester City
 Sally Duncan MYP, Manchester
 Oliver Edwards MYP, Hampshire
 Kieran Hutchinson Dean MYP, Leeds
 Gareth Snell MYP, Mid-Suffolk

Academics

Professor Stephen Coleman, Visiting Professor in e-Democracy, Oxford Internet Institute†
 Ivor Gaber, Emeritus Professor of Broadcast Journalism, Goldsmith College, London
 Dr Ralph Negrine, Director of the Centre for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester
 Paul Whiteley Director of the ESRC Democracy and Participation Programme & Citizen Audit, University of Essex

Journalists

Elinor Goodman, Channel 4 News†
 Steve Richards, The Independent
 George Pascoe-Watson, The Sun†
 Peter Riddell, The Times†

Michael White, The Guardian†

British Broadcasting Corporation

Peter Knowles, Controller, BBC Parliament

Fran Unsworth, Head of Political Programmes

BBC iCAN

Martin Vogel, Project Leader

James Cronin, Technical Lead

Others

The 300 Group

Ann Swain

Department for Education and Skills

Stephen Twigg MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State,

Equal Opportunities Commission

Sam Smethers, Parliament and Public Affairs Manager

Fawcett Society

Katherine Rake, Director

Lewisham Local Education Authority

Duncan Cullimore, School Improvement Officer (14–19)

MORI

Ben Page, Director of Government Research

Opinion Leader Research

Deborah Mattinson, Chief Executive

Plain English Campaign

Peter Griffiths, George Maher and John Wild

Prime Minister's Strategy Unit

Will Cavendish and David Halpern

Annex B

Members' Questionnaire

SELECT COMMITTEE ON MODERNISATION OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Modernisation Committee is currently inquiring into how Parliament might better engage the public in the parliamentary process. The Committee is keen to hear the views of all Members on these issues, as well as any suggestions that are not covered by questions in the survey. If you wish to send a separate note please feel free to do so.

1. Communicating with constituents

1.1 We would like to know how you inform your constituents about parliamentary business. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the most useful, how would you rate the following? Please circle.

(a)	Constituency surgeries	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	33	25	48	44	36
(b)	Public meetings	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	12	28	43	52	41
(c)	Newsletters	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	59	65	33	18	7
(d)	Annual reports	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	53	43	23	17	23
(e)	Other large-scale mailing	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	46	41	34	15	24
(f)	Individual letters	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	91	42	30	11	10
(g)	E-mail	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	26	52	43	38	15
(h)	Website	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	28	56	43	29	18

1.2 Are the existing parliamentary rules governing MPs mailing letters, circulars or annual reports to constituents clear enough? (1- very clear – 5 – very unclear)

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	40	54	39	31	13

Are the rules in need of updating? If so how?

The restriction on writing to constituents who have not first contacted the Member should be lifted; it is circumvented or ignored by some anyway. Members should be able to write to all residents of a given area in response to local issues (e.g. planning, crime).

1.3 Is the Incidental Expenses Provision sufficient to meet your needs in dealing with constituency cases?

This question received one of the largest numbers of responses: an overwhelming no, but a few Members believe that it is sufficient. Individual casework places a huge burden on the IEP. It is the only allowance which is really tight. It is insufficient to pay even three staff a decent salary. The IEP does not cover the cost of staff at both Westminster and the constituency—some argue for free provision of staff/facilities at Westminster, with a cash-limited budget for constituency offices.

1.4 Are there other ways the Commons could improve your ability to communicate with your constituents?

Most answers refer to increased funding: more funding for newsletters, reports and bulletins the most common answer. Direct funding of locally-distributed Annual Reports should be separate from IEP. All MPs should have standard websites hosted on the parliament.uk servers. Give MPs the facility to run their own e-consultations for constituents. Again, a significant minority are happy with the status quo.

1.5 How often do constituents inquire about specific items of Commons business, either past or forthcoming?

(1- very frequently – 5 – not at all)

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	36	55	68	30	

1.6 Do you have sufficient information to give constituents about what is going on in Parliament?

(1 – sufficient – 5 – insufficient)

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	56	84	22	19	6

1.7 Would you welcome a short Commons newsletter on previous or forthcoming business to

circulate to constituents?

(1 – very useful – 5 – not at all)

Paper version newsletter	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	60	29	24	24	38

Electronic version newsletter	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	56	29	27	20	42

2. Improving public understanding of Parliament

2.1 Are the following Parliamentary publications sufficiently clear?

(1 – very clear – 5 – not clear at all)

(a)	Summary Agenda and Order Paper	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	36	51	46	37	12
(b)	Weekly Information Bulletin	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	24	72	52	25	4
(c)	Select Committee Publications	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	31	83	49	15	1
(d)	Bills and Explanatory Notes	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	24	49	40	49	17
(e)	Hansard	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	77	70	24	6	5
(f)	Library Factsheets	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	83	55	10	2	4
(g)	Other (please specify):					

2.2 In some countries first time voters are sent ‘voter introduction packs’ guiding them through the implications of voting. Is an ‘Introduction to Parliament pack’ something you would support?

(1 – support strongly – 5 – not at all)

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	103	35	16	11	16

What kind of information might it contain?

How to register and how to vote (incl. postal and proxy voting); role and function of an MP, local councillor, MEP, etc., especially an indication of which types of problem are dealt with by each tier of government; how politics affects people’s everyday lives; a bit of history; citizens’ rights; how to make your voice heard

2.3 Should parliamentary business (eg Debates, Questions, Committees) be re-structured or language simplified that would enable better public understanding?

(1 – support strongly – 5 – not at all)

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	53	32	24	26	38

If so, which ones and how?

Few responses. Some suggest simplifying language, procedures and ‘traditions’, but no real concrete proposals. Members could call each other by name. Improved information for people in the public gallery. One or two Members are resistant to what they see as ‘dumbing down’.

2.4 Should explanatory material for legislation or debates (eg explanatory notes for bills) be improved?

	(1 – support strongly – 5 – not at all)				
	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	58	59	26	23	10

If so, how?

Again, few concrete proposals: better integration of the bill, amendment papers and selection lists was suggested by a few Members. One suggested that ENs could contain more examples of how the legislation would work in practice.

3. Debating public concerns

3.1 How effectively does the House respond to issues of public concern?

	(1 – very effectively - 5 – very poorly)				
	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	10	58	57	41	12

Comments?

General consensus that the House could better reflect issues of public concern. Several Members welcome the shorter tabling time for questions. Other suggestions include more general debates, as opposed to legislative business, regular debates on EDMs, and greater use of Urgent Questions.

3.2 Are there sufficient routes for voters to make their concerns known to Parliament?

	(1 - sufficient – 5 - insufficient)				
	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	46	60	37	26	10

How strongly do you agree with the following statements (1 – agree strongly – 5 – disagree strongly)

3.3 The House of Commons requires other means for responding to public concerns

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	36	55	42	23	27

3.4 Members of the public be allowed to show support for EDMs

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	10	24	22	22	104

3.5 EDMs should be debatable

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	44	54	25	22	37

3.6 More time be allowed in the Chamber for the presentation of Petitions(for example, allowing the presenting Member to make a short speech on the subject of the Petition)

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	33	57	30	28	35

3.7 The Speaker should give priority to proposals for adjournment debates which are based on petitions

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	13	33	44	40	55

3.8 Petitions should routinely be referred to select committees for consideration

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	15	40	42	35	51

3.9 A number of bills are currently considered in draft each Session, allowing a select committee to take public evidence on the bill before it is formally presented. There should be more opportunity for the public to submit evidence to select committees on bills

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	85	56	21	8	9

3.10 Are there other ways that issues of public concern could be brought to bear on the agenda at Westminster?

Very few suggestions, though some commented that, to the extent that business is driven by outside pressure, it is from lobby/pressure groups, rather than individuals. Electronic consultation, including chat rooms; a petitions committee; more focus on MPs' constituency role; improve profile (and resources) of select committees.

4. Public access to the Parliamentary Estate

4.1 How often have you used the new Central Tours Office to book tours for visitors?

(1 – very frequently – 5 – not at all)

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	45	68	32	20	14

4.2 How effective has the Summer opening of the Line of Route been in improving access for visitors to the Palace?

(1 – very effective – 5 – very ineffective)

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	18	62	58	13	4

4.3 How do you rate the new Jubilee Cafeteria as a facility for visiting constituents?

	(1- very good – 5 – very poor)				
	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	23	93	46	8	4

4.4 Would you support more tours for constituents which, if practicable, incorporate access to the Chamber while the House is sitting, or to a Select Committee meeting?

	(1 – very supportive – 5 – not at all)				
	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	74	62	18	7	18

Comments?

Members from outside the South-East of England commented on the difficulties faced by their constituents visiting Westminster. Numerous comments on sitting hours. Divided opinion on whether visitors want to see Parliament at work or museum.

4.5 Bearing in mind the increased expense involved, for example, in the provision of extra security services, would you support tours of the Palace take place on Saturdays and Sundays?

	(1 – very supportive – 5 – not at all)				
	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	69	57	35	9	18

4.6 As part of the effort to provide better visitors' facilities would you support the creation of a comprehensive citizens' education centre at Westminster?

	(1 – very supportive – 5 – not at all)				
	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	89	54	18	8	18

4.7..What measures could be taken to improve take-up of unused tour slots during the week?

Encourage groups / organisations / schools to come at those times; no reason why school visits must be in term time. Negotiate cheap travel packages with national rail/bus operators. More publicity/advertising.

4.8..Are there other ways it could be made easier for your constituents to access the building?

Not many suggestions. Some concerns about turning the Palace into a 'theme park'. Expand the resources of the Education Unit.

5. The provision of information for the public

5.1 How frequently do you use the following on-line services in your work, or direct constituents towards them as a source of Parliamentary information

(a)	PDVN	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	113	38	13	4	11
(b)	Parliamentary Intranet Web pages	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	75	52	24	16	12
(c)	Webcasting of Parliament	1	2	3	4	5

	No. responses	6	15	32	41	78
(d)	explore.parliament.uk	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	5	11	21	38	89
(e)	Library publications (Factsheets, standard notes, etc)	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	61	67	29	21	3
(f)	Materials produced by the Parliamentary Education Unit	1	2	3	4	5
	No. responses	13	50	54	40	19

5.2 How frequently do you organise activities for schools in your constituency through the Education Unit?

(1 – very frequently – 5 – not at all)

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	5	18	48	56	58

5.3 How do you rate the quality of the webcasting of Parliamentary proceedings?

(1 – very good – 5 – very poor)

	1	2	3	4	5
No. responses	11	23	56	19	6

5.4 Is there any other specific information you would like to see the House produce for visitors/constituents?

Leaflets for visitors to the building. Leaflets / factsheets for standing and select committee meetings [These are already provided for select committee meetings.]

5.5 Are there other ways we might make greater use of modern technology to improve the process of communications, for example, by the provision of a facility for on-line surveys?

Greater use of the Internet is the commonest theme. A number of Members favour the facility for them to run their own on-line consultations and surveys. Some argue that the MP should be the principal conduit of information between the public and Parliament (and vice versa) and that expanding MPs' resources is the best way of connecting with the public.

Reports from the Committee since the beginning of the 2001 Parliament

Session 2003–04

Memorandum	Scrutiny of European Matters in the House of Commons: Government Memorandum from the Leader of the House of Commons	HC 508
First Report	Connecting Parliament with the Public	HC 368

Session 2002–03

First Report	Programming of Bills	HC 1222
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Session 2001–02

First Report	Select Committees	HC 224
Second Report	Modernisation of the House of Commons: A Reform Programme	HC 1168