

# Administration Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 4151 Fax 020 7219 2622 Email [ac@parliament.uk](mailto:ac@parliament.uk) Website [www.parliament.uk/ac](http://www.parliament.uk/ac)

Written evidence published by the Committee for the inquiry into *Catering Services in the House of Commons*

- CS 01 Bob Ainsworth MP
- CS 02 Lorely Burt MP
- CS 03 Lorely Burt MP – further written evidence
- CS 04 Dr Thérèse Coffey MP
- CS 05 Dr Thérèse Coffey MP – further written evidence
- CS 06 David Davies MP
- CS 07 Brian H Donohoe MP
- CS 08 Brian H. Donohoe MP – further written evidence
- CS 09 Clive Efford MP
- CS 10 Richard Graham MP
- CS 11 Margot James
- CS 12 Caroline Lucas MP
- CS 13 Fiona Mactaggart MP
- CS 14 Kerry McCarthy MP
- CS 15 Madeleine Moon MP
- CS 16 Teresa Pearce MP
- CS 17 Andrew Robathan MP
- CS 18 Laurence Robertson MP
- CS 19 Jim Sheridan MP
- CS 20 Jo Swinson MP
- CS 21 Stephen Williams MP
- CS 22 Wendy Wilson, Branch Chair, FDA union
- CS 23 GMB Branch Secretary
- CS 24 GMB – further written evidence
- CS 25 PCS Union
- CS 26 Trade Union Side (TUS)
- CS 27 Unite (T&G) Parliamentary Staff Branch
- CS 28 Chief Executive and Clerk, National Assembly for Wales
- CS 29 Facilities Directorate, Northern Ireland Assembly
- CS 30 Facilities Manager, The Scottish Parliament
- CS 31 Parliamentary Clerk, Department of Culture, Media and Sport
- CS 32 Ministry of Defence
- CS 33 Parliamentary Section, Department for Education
- CS 34 Strategic Estates Adviser, Department of Health
- CS 35 Parliamentary Clerk, Ministry of Justice
- CS 36 Scotland Office
- CS 37 Parliamentary Clerk, Department for Transport
- CS 38 Parliamentary Clerk, HM Treasury
- CS 39 MAPSA
- CS 40 Frances Allingham, House of Commons staff
- CS 41 Tom Jones, Members' staff
- CS 42 Emma Laity, Members' staff
- CS 43 Linda Rostron, House of Commons staff
- CS 44 Linda Rostron, House of Commons staff – further written evidence
- CS 45 Selina Short, Members' staff

- CS 46 CPA – UK Branch
- CS 47 Parliamentary Press Gallery
- CS 48 Parliamentary Press Gallery – further written evidence
- CS 49 Parliamentary Press Gallery – further written evidence

**Written evidence submitted by Bob Ainsworth MP**

Put the whole thing out to private sector tender. It could not be worse.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Lorely Burt MP**

May I add my voice to the clamour from my colleagues regarding the new charging structure in the members dining room.

Making it a flat £15 fee whatever you have may serve the purposes of balancing the books for the catering department, but it does not help anyone who does not want three courses and considers it inequitable to be charged for courses they have not consumed (or is on a diet and can't resist getting their value for money!)

Many colleagues do not claim the cost of their meals back from the taxpayer, who seems to be paying through the nose for the convenience of the catering department.

Several of my colleagues, including at least one minister of state, have now boycotted the dining room. The liberal democrats coalesce around one table and dinner is an important social function for us. The level of resentment is high.

Please reinstate the old system which was much fairer, or at least give us the option of an amount per course consumed.

*October 2010*

## **Further written evidence submitted by Lorely Burt MP**

Liberal democrats are a small parliamentary group and we like to sit together. However if you choose anything but the buffet, or if you want to order a drink, the arrival and departure of colleagues seems to faze the staff and we have to wait inordinate lengths of time. No self-respecting restaurant could offer the service they do and expect to retain customers. I feel angry about this because I see this opportunity to get together as very important.

Different fashions in food have seen us served with a smear of mashed potato to represent the carbohydrate part of the meal plus other decorations which are supposed to represent the vegetables. This is not what a hungry MP needs for their dinner.

Then there is the change in the pricing system. I learn from colleagues that one can now purchase one course for £10, but second and third courses (either or both) add a further £5 to the cost. I cannot imagine where the logic of this comes from. I have never seen a commercial organisation trying to sell such a strange offer.

The Pugin Room has great and courteous service. However this little haven has now become a rare treat because of the hike in prices. One colleague said they had been charged £17 for 2 Chablis! That, with respect, is taking the Mickey! Catering in other parts of the estate is good. For staff the biggest issue is that everything other than The Debate is closed during recess. Choice and quality is good and prices have not risen as much as they have feared. I hope this helps.

*November 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Dr Thérèse Coffey MP**

A. The changes to the Members' Dining Room offering was not well advertised and even now, it is not clear to members about prices for lunch or dinner, dining as members or with guests.

The one price of £15 "all or as little as you can eat" is poor. It has different perceptions and consequences –

- i. The new price is "magically" the same as the IPSA limit so taking the maximum from the taxpayer (where the Member reclaims for food);
- ii. Members may be inclined to order more food than may really be required; this has led to slow service on the busy Monday and Tuesday nights;
- iii. Rarely would Members spend £15 on food and so either spent less or were able to buy a soft drink and still come under the £15 limit;
- iv. Encouraging Members to eat onsite should be good for recouping the cost of catering; this move may encourage Members to eat offsite, even though recompense of that is currently deemed a taxable benefit.

B. Entertaining friends, constituents and similar appears to have doubled in price. I suggest this may actually trigger a decline in the use of the Dining Rooms at lunchtime. I hope the Catering Committee will review.

C. I support the move to "pub prices".

*October 2010*

**Further written evidence submitted by Dr Thérèse Coffey MP**

If you are to persist with the £15 charge, why not cut out the admin and deal direct with IPSA with a signing in register for dinner.

*October 2010*

### **Written evidence submitted by David Davies MP**

There is a huge problem with mice and rats in many of the areas where food is served. I myself have on numerous occasions seen mice/ rats running around in the Members Tea Room, the Smoking Room and the Terrace cafeteria.

On one instance I saw a mouse roaming the terrace café where large numbers of people were dining in broad daylight. When I pointed it out to a member of staff she shrugged and told me that "We call him Albert and he always pops out at this time of day."

If we are to be charged " the going rate" for cups of tea then I think we have the right to the same levels of cleanliness that would apply in a public restaurant.

Perhaps it is something the Committee might consider.

*September 2010*

**Written evidence submitted by Brian H. Donohoe MP**

Simple and straight forward is that I believe the price 'hike' will drive the MPs out the Dining areas and will be replaced by the 'Corporates'.

*October 2010*

**Further written evidence submitted by Brian H. Donohoe MP**

The prices in the facilities have got to 5 Star Hotel levels.

i.e. 2 glasses of wine in the Pugin Room £14.00

6 Cups of tea £10.50

I don't expect to pay that in my 'Works Canteen'.

*October 2010*

### **Written evidence submitted by Clive Efford MP**

I find the £15 fixed charge unacceptable as it is designed to maximise income based on the allowances regardless of the cost of what members have eaten. I recommend fixed sums for each course and that each individual is then given a receipt according to the courses they have had.

*November 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Richard Graham MP**

I think the general quality of catering in the House of Commons is very good, the staff outstanding, and I'm grateful to all those involved.

One suggestion:

Could the catering committee do more to support great British foods, and advertise them on its menus?

For example the famous EU protected brand name of Gloucester Old Spot Sausages: they're absolutely delicious. Old Spot Sausages and mash in the Strangers and Members dining Room would be a sell out. And how about some single and double Gloucester cheese on the cheese board?

I believe the availability and marketing of Gloucester sausages and cheese and other well known British food brands would be good for Commons revenue (members would pay more for these renowned delicacies), good for the health of members and staff (setting an example on national obesity), and good for our role as the Champion of all that is best in our country.

And how about going a step further and having a British Foods Market Week with food stands in Westminster Hall, with a special overseas buyers reception – and foreign hoteliers/restaurants/airlines etc come over to see our delicacies in the finest setting for a food market in the world, opened by HRH Prince of Wales beside a Gloucester Old Spot pig and a Cotswolds sheep.

The FCO is going to be doing more exporting – no reason why Westminster Hall cannot become a great showcase for our leading products (and a modest revenue generator for Parliament).

Have Aston Martin or Jaguar ever been invited to do a car launch in Westminster Hall?

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Margot James MP**

If I am not too late I thought I would send you a few views, I must say that I have yet to avail myself of the various retail facilities and gym and so forth that exist so my feedback is confined to the catering services. Generally I find the catering to be of a high standard and the service is excellent.

My main complaint is the new system of payment in the members dining room. I rarely have time for more than one course but I used to enjoy going in there at around 9pm on a Monday or Tuesday night and have a main course and a glass of wine or two. I find it very annoying that I have to pay a flat rate of £15.00 for this now as I rarely bill that amount with my choices. As I don't claim food as an expense I find this increased cost to be quite a deterrent and I now use the tea rooms more often instead of the members dining room.

My second suggestion is to widen the choice of wines available by the glass in Strangers Dining room (I am not sure whether this is the same list as in Members). Chardonnay is a very popular varietal and the only one available is a Chablis – which is a very specific flinty style of Chardonnay – and frankly at that price level really quite acidic! It would be nice to have another Chardonnay choice from a warmer climate capable of providing a slightly fuller bodied more rounded style of wine.

Finally it would be wonderful if staff could clear the tables on the terrace during the Summer months. I realise that the cost of having staff out there regularly might be prohibitive in the current climate, but if it could be resourced I do think this would improve the ambience out there no end. I really was quite shocked at the state of it when I first went out there last Summer, it really does resemble a not particularly well cared for station cafe – the Members fault no doubt!

I would like to take this opportunity to say how wonderfully friendly, polite and helpful at all times the catering and serving staff are. And I would like to pay special compliments to the truly excellent men in the Pugin Room.

*November 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Caroline Lucas MP**

I am writing with a short submission to ask your committee to consider two proposals to help reduce the carbon footprint of catering department.

### *Meat Free Monday*

The first proposal is to ask you to consider the attached correspondence that I have had with Sue Harrison, the Director of Catering and Retail Services for the Commons. As you will note, along with colleagues from other parties, I wrote to ask if Ms Harrison and her counterpart in the House of Lords would consider introducing 'Meat Free Monday' (MFM) to the catering outlets in Parliament.

You may already be aware of this campaign, the central message of which is what a difference one meat free day can make to the environment.

Livestock farming is now recognised as a significant contributor to today's greatest environmental problems. According to the United Nations, it is responsible for 18 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, more than the entire transport sector combined.

Parliament could send a powerful message and set a great example by designating one day a week as Meat-Free.

As you will note, I made the above points in my letter to Ms Harrison. However, as you will imagine, I was disappointed in Ms Harrison's negative response, based on her fear that MFM would be 'deeply divisive and disruptive'. I would like to try and address her concern in this submission as I feel this is a misconception and that we could move forward on this issue.

I would like to clarify that the MFM idea is that it wouldn't be possible to buy meat in Parliament on that day, not that anyone would be told not to eat it. The aim of making one day meat free is not to 'enforce an eating regime' – rather it is instead very much about encouraging people to take a day a week 'off' eating meat to help save the planet. If someone wanted to eat a ham sandwich on the Parliamentary Estate on a Monday of course they could!

There is cross party consensus that climate change is the biggest issue facing human-kind. I would suggest that if properly explained a MFM in Parliament might create a minority of vocal detractors but in reality I believe it would command widespread support and would not be divisive.

The Committee will no doubt have noticed publication today of WWF's bi-annual Living Planet report.[1] The key finding of which is that humanity's demands exceed our planet's capacity to sustain us. MFM could be part of Parliament's response to this and show us to be taking a lead on climate change and the crucial issue of reducing our carbon footprint

I do urge the Committee to give active consideration to the MFM proposal. Given the extremely high standard of vegetarian cooking by Parliament's catering services, this would in my view be easily achievable whilst operating a MFM policy.

### *Re-usable takeaway cups*

Finally, I would also ask the Committee to consider recommending the introduction of a financial disincentive to using take-away paper cups and plastic lids whilst at the same time making available re-usable travel/thermos mugs for takeaway hot drinks.

---

Sue Harrison Director of Catering & Retail Services (Commons)  
Tim Lamming Head of Catering and Retail Services (Lords)

By email

Dear Sue and Tim,

Meat Free Monday

We are writing to ask if you would consider introducing Meat Free Monday to the catering outlets in Parliament. You may already be aware of this campaign, the central message of which is what a difference one meat free day can make.

Farming and slaughtering animals is now recognised as a significant contributor to today's greatest environmental problems. According to the United Nations, animal farming is responsible for 18 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, more than the entire transport sector combined. As well as saving carbon, reducing the amount of meat in our diets will also help improve health.

Parliament could send a powerful message and set a great example by designating one day a week as Meat-Free and we very much hope that you will be supportive of this initiative.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

CAROLINE LUCAS MP

JOHN LEECH MP

---

Caroline Lucas MP  
John Leech MP  
Kerry McCarty MP

By email

09 September 2010

Dear Ms Lucas, Mr Leech and Ms McCarthy  
Thank you for your email asking me to consider introducing Meat Free Monday into the catering outlets in the House of Commons. I have, indeed, already heard of this campaign and am aware of the issues it is highlighting.

As you can imagine, we receive many similar requests to support campaigns for one thing or another. A few, such as Fairtrade Fortnight, we regularly support. However, in considering a request, I must balance the interests of Members, or others, making the application against the interests of our customers. The cafeterias and restaurants in the House of Commons are primarily provided as a place for Members and staff to take a meal break away from their work or to offer hospitality, and it is the responsibility of my Department to provide food that is not only nutritious and appetising, but also food that they want to eat.

Much as some Members and staff would undoubtedly share your support for the campaign, I fear that it would be deeply divisive and disruptive to enforce an eating regime – even for one day – that denied our customers the opportunity to eat meat if they so choose. On that basis, regret that I am unable to support your proposition.

Yours sincerely

Sue Harrison  
Director of Catering and Retail Services

*October 2010*

### **Written evidence submitted by Fiona Mactaggart MP**

I do not have time to write a considered response to your review, but I have always believed that there should be access to a pleasant affordable restaurant where members of both houses can eat together.

And this week I experienced the new fixed price system in the members dining room and it is ridiculous and should be ended. I do not want three courses and previous bills there which I have incurred have usually been around £10. I know prices have gone up, but I do not find it acceptable to pay £15 to dine if I just want one course.

And the salads in the members tea room are too cold.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Kerry McCarthy MP**

I understand you are the person to contact with comments/suggestions about catering facilities in the Commons.

I am a vegan, as are at least two other MPs. There are many others who are vegetarian. (I emailed around during the last parliamentary session and I think about 20 MPs replied to say they were vegetarian, or in some cases ate fish but not meat).

The provision for us in Parliament really is poor. In particular there is no reason why the salad bars could not be made more suitable for vegans/ vegetarians - for example, not putting meat in the pasta salads, not smothering everything with mayonnaise, etc. I wish the caterers would just stop and think before they add extra ingredients to a dish, and consider whether they could produce something very similar, with either the meat/ dairy option on the side, or without it altogether. This would also be helpful to those with food intolerances. Why can't the salad bars operate on a similar principle to places like Tossed, where all the ingredients are separate and people just make their own combination?

Also - and you may not be the right person to lobby on this - it's World Vegan Day on 1st November, and the whole of November is earmarked as World Vegan Month. Any chance of noting this, for example, by having a day when there are several vegan options on the menus around the House?

Thank you for reading this.

*October 2010*

### **Written evidence submitted by Madeleine Moon MP**

I wish to raise the issue of charges for food in the members dining room. When I visited the dining room recently I wanted only a starter and was asked to pay £15 as a standard charge for food there. It was agreed that this was inappropriate but what concerns me is that members are no longer seeking to eat in the dining room for fear of charges. Staff are no longer receiving the tips they used to receive which affects their income. I fear that IPSA is on course to close down dining facilities here and losing staff their jobs if we are not careful.

I am also aware that staff are bringing in sandwiches and meals to heat in their rooms rather than pay the higher prices. I again fear for the impact on staff who work in the various food outlets.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Teresa Pearce MP**

I am writing to register my concerns about the recent decision to implement a flat £15 charge in the Members Dining Room.

I understand the decision to introduce the flat fee was made during a meeting of the House of Commons Commission on 21 June. Other changes decided at that meeting, such as to increase catering prices across the Parliamentary Estate, have been communicated to Members and their staff through various bulletins on the intranet. However, the decision to introduce a flat £15 charge in the Members Dining Room was not communicated to Members and I do not believe that we have been adequately consulted about the change.

I am very concerned about the introduction of this flat rate fee, as I do not believe this represents good value for money for the taxpayer. I often visit the Members Dining Room for light meals for which the retail price is far below £15. I am also concerned about the use of non-itemised receipts in the Members Dining Room and the impression this may give the general public when the subsistence claims of Members are published.

I would be grateful if you would register these objections and speak to the House of Commons Commission about reviewing this decision.

*October 2010*

**Written evidence submitted by Andrew Robathan MP**

I am sure others have raised the £15 set meal in the Dining Room. It is putting me off eating dinner in the members Dining Room for one.

I rarely want 3 courses – more regularly only one and a glass of wine – but feel compelled to eat 3 courses if paid for! We really should be able to choose, notwithstanding the silly IPSA rules.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Laurence Robertson MP**

I should like to make the following submission.

The catering throughout the Palace is of mixed standard. The Churchill Restaurant provides good food, though from a limited menu and at restaurant prices. Service recently has been slow. The Strangers and members Dining Rooms, again, provide good food from limited menus at restaurant prices. The Adjournment I would assess in a similar way. In my view there should be no attempt to increase prices.

The Strangers café provides sub-standard food. On occasions, it is literally uneatable. The choice is also limited. It should be noted that mainly staff use this café and any increase in price would be borne by them. In my view, the poor food reflects the current low prices. I would say the Debate is similar. The description on the Parliamentary web-site has to be a joke! Food in 1 Parliament Street is a little better.

Of the bars, Strangers provides good value for money. The prices are cheaper than in pubs but this would be because the bar is probably not tied to a pub chain (eg Punch, Enterprise etc) whereas many pubs are.

As I say, the standards of catering in the Palace is mixed and I do not, therefore, believe that price increases can be justified.

I hope this is helpful.

*September 2010*

## Written evidence submitted by Jim Sheridan MP

Could I begin by congratulating Sir Alan on his appointment as Chair of the Administration committee, I am confident his knowledge, experience and track record on representing the concerns of members will prove to be a valuable asset to the committee. I am sure I speak for many elected colleagues when I say that the facilities for members, staff and their families have gradually been eroded since becoming a member in 2001. My views do not in any way reflect the collective punishment currently being implemented by IPSA and being dealt with separately by another body.

The price increases on the parliamentary estate due to be implemented in September are being done so as I see it without any consultation with members and will impact significantly on their staff. My understanding is that this is based on high street prices who pay taxes which are not applicable to Westminster, so where will this additional revenue go?

Annie's bar was closed for reasons that it was not making a profit, and it was convenient to provide for additional accommodation for house authorities staff, perhaps if it was marketed properly there could have been a different outcome.

Bellamys bar was also closed, again without any consultation to provide a creche facility for members and staff. Whilst the principle was admirable the question remains why does it have to be at a cost to members facilities.

If these measures are designed to save taxpayers money, could I suggest you look at the senior management structures and salaries. From my perspective there are many suits wandering the catering corridors without any purpose in life.

Finally as predicted those who used these facilities are now corralled into strangers bar which is now in my view seriously overcrowded and will be a major health and safety issue in the Autumn/Winter months. Also the staff who work in there do a magnificent job under extremely challenging job including having to explain why they have run out of beer as happened recently Unlike milk beer does not turn sour so it begs the question why did this happen. Despite asking the question of management why this happened I still to date await a reply

Apologies for the negativity but I do hope that when future decisions are being made affecting members facilities all options are explored prior to implementation Equally so it would be nice to see the decision makers actually using the facilities that they believe suitable for the rest of us.

If possible could you please circulate this amongst other members of the committee.

*July 2010*

## Written evidence submitted by Jo Swinson MP

Apologies for the late reply, but I hope my views can still be considered as part of the review into catering services.

- As a regular user of the House catering services who has a nut allergy, I can say from experience that the service for customers with allergies has greatly improved in most outlets over the last couple of years. Information is much more readily available on ingredients of the various dishes and most staff have a greater awareness. In fact in the Adjournment one member of staff has even remembered my allergy and went out of his way to make sure I was given bread which did not have nuts in it, without me even having to ask!
- In one place it is a bit patchier - the Members' and Strangers' Dining Room - where staff perhaps have not had the same allergy awareness training. It is often much more difficult to explain about my allergy, and at times it has even been suggested that there is nothing I can eat, as everything may contain nuts (not helpful when three line whips require me to remain on the Parliamentary estate until after 11pm, as I have little option but to eat on site!)
- The good progress on menu information and labelling, staff awareness and training should definitely continue, as working within the Parliamentary estate there are dozens if not hundreds of people who have a food allergy.
- Finally, while my main reason for responding to this review is regarding allergy, I would make an additional comment about the recent change to Members' Dining Room, now charging a flat rate of £15. This seems strange, as it encourages MPs to have a full three-course meal when dining there or receive poor value for money. Time-wise and health-wise, regularly incentivising a three-course meal doesn't seem sensible, plus it ignores the reality of how many MPs use the dining room – for a bite to eat with colleagues close to the chamber in between meetings or votes. It would be much better to return to a system of charging for what is consumed, allowing MPs to have and pay for three courses if they so wish, but also catering for MPs wishing a simple main course supper.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Stephen Williams MP**

Re the latest committee update and request for views on catering, I would like to offer the following view on catering in the members' dining rooms. Last night I wanted only one course from the buffet table as I was taking part in a debate. I was told that I would have to pay £15 whether I had one course or three plus coffee! Fixed price menus are common in restaurants but surely the price could be broken down to its components. I'm sure the House should not be encouraging Members to get fat for £15.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Wendy Wilson, Branch Chair, FDA union**

Thank you for your invitation to submit written evidence to the Administration Committee's review of catering services in the House of Commons. The FDA represents over 120 staff in the House of Commons. The following submission reflects comments made by FDA members in response to your terms of reference.

- The standard of service in House of Commons catering outlets is generally considered to be high. FDA members appreciate that catering services operate in a demanding political environment, where they are subject to greater scrutiny than the average work canteen.
- Overcrowding is a problem at peak times, particularly in the Debate cafeteria at lunch times. Overcrowding does not only occur when the House is sitting, but also during recesses when other outlets are often closed for refurbishment and staff have a more restricted choice of where to eat.
- Many of the outlets in the House of Commons are used as meeting venues as well as places to eat. A range of outlets is needed to suit the different types of meeting with Members/staff/external guests etc. However, more could be done to differentiate between the various catering outlets serving different needs. For example, some outlets could offer a more diverse and elaborate menu with others serving plainer food at lower prices. This would increase choice for staff.
- Improvements in labelling and nutritional information have been welcomed, but could go further. For example, meals could include calorie counts and an indication of what exactly is meant by the colour coding system for low/medium/high fat content.
- FDA members would also value more information on the sourcing and quality of ingredients, for example are all eggs free-range? Which ingredients are fair-trade? From which countries are seasonal ingredients sourced?

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Will Conway, GMB Branch Secretary**

The House of Commons GMB Branch would like to make the following submission to the Administration Committee.

On the current price rises, we do not believe that they were entirely appropriate or completely thought through; particularly for the cafeterias. While this should not financially affect the grades represented by the GMB, they will be in the firing line for unhappy customers. The increases should also be seen in the context of the potential pay freeze for many House Staff.

We believe that the sole use of benchmarking as a methodology was flawed; benchmarking uses a combination of comparators, by only focussing on price the credibility is lost as one cannot be sure that the comparison is valid. The sole use of this methodology will inevitably give the impression that it was to ensure that custom is not lost purely on the basis of price, but, were the local competitors taken into account? Tesco is the nearest outlet for confectionery and sandwiches, but we are now more expensive than them, the various restaurants and takeaways in Strutton Ground are competition, particularly for the Portcullis Cafeteria in 7 Millbank, but were they compared?

There is also the question of the purpose of the various outlets, if the cafeterias are meant to be providing wholesome, affordable meals for MPs, staff of the House and visitors, then this should be taken into account, as should the fact that most staff are unable to spare the time to leave the House precincts during their meal breaks. A combination of benchmarking and margin-setting may have been more appropriate. In this way, the outlets which provide non-essential services, such as the bars and banqueting areas, are differentiated from core areas, such as the cafeterias. The maintenance of the margin should also be stressed; price increases from suppliers should be passed on promptly without having to wait for approval from the Domestic Committees. It should not be acceptable to sell items at a loss.

On savings, the supply of free snacks to users of the Pugin and Members' Smoking Rooms should come to an end.

### **Access**

Members should be made to be aware that where access is restricted, they are likely to be challenged. Passes should be worn and shown readily if requested.

Consideration might be given to opening up weekend access for weddings and civil partnerships. If this was not restricted to members, the profit gained would be higher because of the members' discount now applied.

Access to the Terrace and Strangers' Bar should be retained at the current level, but more strongly enforced. Consideration might be given, however, to adding Members' partners to the list of those allowed to buy drinks. The Members Only area on the Terrace should be reviewed. It appears to be much underused for its stated purpose. If it is to be retained, thought should be given as to its size and to policing so that guests are not taken into it.

Consideration should be given to access to The Adjournment from Wednesday nights onwards. It is much underused. The pricing might also be looked at, should the price be the same at lunchtime as in the evening?

### **Underuse of Facilities**

The Members' Smoking Room could be let for Receptions at weekends. The furniture is presently looked upon as an obstacle, but maybe it could be an advantage. It gives the room a uniqueness that could give it a certain cachet as a venue, this could be reflected in the hire charge. Consideration could also be given to wider or different use during the week as it is a much underused facility.

### **Improvements**

Credit should be given for the hard work and achievements of the staff already, particularly in the kitchens. They have a current finalist in the National Chef of the Year competition (the holder of London Chef of the Year). Holders of the Grand Prix at Hotelympia. Their work in the community through outreach programmes, "Adopt a School" and work experience placements, give the work of the House a positive boost in the community.

The operation of the Members' and Strangers' Dining Rooms should be reviewed; changes in the past have been resisted by some of the more traditional Members. The Department should be allowed to offer a more modern fine dining style, with some elements of the traditional. Ways of increasing use of these facilities should be examined so that use is maximised without increasing the cost to the Department. If it were easier to predict customer numbers; control of staffing levels would be simplified. Solutions might include set menus, taking into account expense limits, and examining different menus and price structures for quieter periods.

Although not entirely cost neutral, thought should be given to reviving the plan to bottle water in the old "Annie's Bar". If undertaken with the House of Lords, this could result in long term savings in the cost of water supplied to Committees.

The possibility of more direct selling to the public could be examined. This could be through an existing venue such as the Parliamentary Bookshop. This could be viewed as "weakening the brand" by members, but, if the range of goods available is different to that available internally, that should not be a concern.

Use of the Terrace Pavilion Bar during the Spring and Summer should be examined. Commitment to it has been lacking in recent years. It could significantly help to relieve pressure on the Strangers' Bar while developing its own identity. A cream tea service and ice creams could both be offered during the day as well as the drinks currently served. Daytime staffing should be possible from existing resources. Banqueting should be prepared to give up the venue for these months.

Herbs could be grown in the containers on the Terrace. While this would be unlikely to be able to satisfy all the needs of the Department, it has peripheral advantages, in the perception of people and in the environment of the Terrace.

Any savings would be likely to be quite small and dependent on the contract with the gardeners.

Purchasing practices should be examined so that we are able to take advantage of suppliers' offers, and to market them quickly, benefitting both customers, through better pricing, and the Department through increased margins.

### **House of Lords**

Consideration should be given to greater cooperation with the House of Lords in the areas of Stores and Purchasing. Greater discounts might be negotiated with suppliers, and complications arising from the off-site logistics centre could be eased.

*October 2010*

## **Further written evidence submitted by Will Conway, GMB Branch Secretary**

Having now received the proposals for savings and income generation, the GMB House of Commons are grateful for the opportunity to make this further submission to the Committee.

On the document generally, it appears to have an incredible lack of coordination:

- Savings are mixed up with increases in revenue.
- None of the figures include inflation; as the targets we have been given are inclusive of it, surely so should the calculations proposed. The entire document is lacking in coherence and clarity suggesting that it has not been fully thought through. Figures in year one of 9% should equate to 17% by the end of the period. The methodology appears to just go for 17% at any period and that'll do.
- No mention of savings from capital outlay, in fact, capital outlay is not included in some of the figures
- No mention of maintenance or refurbishment, even in Sue Harrison's slightly more detailed presentation.
- Figures for income generation are static, this might be true for Rental income, but should not be true for sales; we should be presuming that growing expertise and inflation will make them increase.
- The paper for the House as a whole says that any of the proposed cuts that are not taken forward will have to be replaced by others. Nobody should be under the impression that a 17% cut in one Department is equal to a similar percentage cut in another. The CRS subsidy is only 2% of the House budget; 17% of that is next to nothing. The federal way that this programme is being conducted fails to address this.

The proposals include cuts of well over 17%, despite the year on year decrease in the Departmental budget already made. As I said to the Committee, this seems vastly unfair on the staff of the Department and threatens its ability to function properly. This would particularly apply when leave is being taken as it may leave us under resourced to cover. It is obviously for the Members to decide, through the Committees, which services they wish to change or do without, but the list looks like a massive kneejerk reaction.

As a further result of the cuts in previous years; the overwhelming bulk of proposed savings are in staff, or human, costs. Because of the composition of the workforce in ethnic background and income; this may well have a negative equality impact if carried through. Many affected staff will be unlikely to find other positions in CRS, and almost impossible to accommodate Housewide.

The proposal to close the Adjournment Restaurant service in favour of a coffee/ bespoke sandwich offering would require a capital spend of some £6 million (figure from Sue Harrison in response to staff question). As I said before, this figure is not mentioned in the document. Obviously, the Members must decide whether they wish to change the service provided as extremely as this proposal, but I am concerned about where this money would be otherwise spent. The Department needs investment into general replacement of equipment and refurbishment of some areas; is this money being taken from that budget? Is

there a budget? There are other areas which look likely to incur sizeable capital spends, the proposals for the souvenir kiosk, Pugin Room and purchase of vending machines for 7 Millbank. The same questions apply.

Generally, we take the view that it is for Members to decide which services they wish to keep or change, but would make the following observations on the detail of the proposals.

Changing the Pugin Room to a bar service might, conceivably, produce an increase in revenue. Would a new bar be politically wise, or what the Members want or need?

The proposal to make the Terrace Cafeteria self clearing seems ambitious. Recent attempts to encourage people have been ignored and the cost of installing a system similar to Bellamy's or 7 Millbank would be very high.

The proposal to use Moncrieff's as a Staff Cafeteria has its attractions for many staff, but access would be difficult. At present CRS staff eat in large blocks, at the start of service generally. Could the lift servicing Moncrieff's cope with the 100+ staff surge in use?

What does "reduction in budget to reflect planned spend" mean in relation to the Training budget reduction?

Would the Souvenir Kiosk make a decent site for a Coffee Bar? There is no space for seating anywhere near; it would mean those without access to the Terrace, disregarding the weather, having to go back to their offices. It has none of the advantages of the Despatch Box. The Terrace Pavilion Bar might be a better venue. If the proposal is that it is to be more of an express outlet for drinks and sandwiches, the problem of seating still applies, with the added problem of staff being pushed to eat meals at their desks. Staff are already compelled, for various reasons, to spend almost all their time in the precincts, they should at least be encouraged to have proper breaks away from their desks.

The proposed increase in revenue from souvenir sales item appears particularly woolly; there is no figure for this or next year and the projected income does not increase year by year. As we already have an outlet and a reasonable line of goods, why are we not starting immediately and showing a bit more ambition. Mr Borley suggests that we can make more money by letting the Bookshop as a coffee shop, I doubt this, but it does not mean that we should delay the sale of goods.

It is a great concern that the prospective income and employment from increased souvenir sales should be kept in-house as far as possible, or it could become something of a Trojan horse. The immediately available properties have the advantage of cellars, and one a first floor. These could be used for the preparation of internet sales. Delivery vans could then collect these goods after dropping off stock. This should create some vacancies at a suitable level for CRS staff.

If the present bookshop were to be used for memorabilia, there would be little or no need for refurbishment. It could carry on its present dual role and income from book sales should increase purely because of increased footfall. There

seems to be a problem in this because of interdepartmental wrangling, as the shop comes under the aegis of DCCS, this may need higher level direction.

The income from catering price increases is a particular example of opaque accounting. The figures again ignore inflation, but they also ignore the projected (6% food, 5% drink, not in document) savings in procurement costs. These would have the potential to increase margins/income, or to freeze prices. It would be nice to know which. Given that the income of our core customers is likely to be frozen, or fall in real terms, and their numbers fall, there are a number of factors affecting these figures. This should be addressed.

There is no mention of revenue from civil partnerships, although I know it is being actively pursued. Add-on revenue from catering and flowers should also be explored.

*November 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Frank Bullen, Branch Secretary, Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS)**

The Public and Commercial Services Union [PCS] would appreciate you bringing to the attention of your Committee, my branch's concerns on aspects of access to facilities within the House.

Recently one of our members, with 30 years' service, was at a function in the Terrace bar. When he went to the bar he was refused because of the anachronistic restriction placed on staff below B2 grade, not being allowed to be served.

You will appreciate this was of great annoyance not only to him, but to other members within his group, many of whom were officer status, [B2 is not of that status]. It is a situation which has been ongoing for years against aggrieved staff.

The incident was raised with the current Speaker, who suggested it be put as evidence to your inquiry.

What the situation highlights is the totally inappropriate access rules to staff from D2 to C bands, who are barred from both access on an individual basis, as well as being unable to purchase drinks in restricted outlets, even if within a party.

It is quite amusing to hear the reasons why such rules apply, more so off the record. Classics such as they can't behave or hold their drink, don't wear the appropriate attire, swearing would be in abundance, the insulting 'can't use a knife and fork'. Management's ultimate piece de resistance would be that these restricted groups would attract unmanageable numbers in the bar if they were allowed unfettered access.

If only the Sports and Social Club had that problem, profits might then clear the country's structural debt!

Now that Bellamy's Bar has closed it exacerbates the dire shortage of licensed facilities in the House.

I jest, but we do have a serious problem in such rules. How can the House claim to be a fully equal employer, as well as having accreditation through Investors in People. If the truth be told, the origins of the ruling was based on class and elitism and reinforced by contemporary social class divisions within the House.

Would someone be barred on race, gender or religion? No. Not surprisingly the restricted grades have a higher racial mix than those permitted access. Does not look good to those outside the House, does it?

The House needs a resolution to this unjust rule.

The PCS requests that all catering outlets that allow B1/2 and Officers of the House admittance and full use of facilities, be open to all House of Commons permanent employees.

It is unlikely that there would be a stampede should such restrictions be lifted. It would be nice for staff to be able to bring a family member or guest to the

House.

There may be a case for a minimum qualifying period, although this would have to overcome any prejudicial grounds that could be seen to be acting against certain groups, perceived or otherwise.

I trust the Committee will take our concerns seriously and subsequently rectify a current blatant discriminatory ruling.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Ken Gall, Trade Union Side (TUS)**

Catering and retail services does an excellent job in providing food and drink for the many people who work in the House of Commons, their guests, the press and members of the Civil Service. The range of food caters for different tastes and dietary requirements and the surroundings in which people dine are generally agreed to be first class.

However, there are a number of long-standing concerns that have been raised by the Trade Union Side in previous inquiries into this subject; one is overcrowding in many of the House of Commons refreshment facilities, and another is access to those facilities.

The Committee will be unsurprised to learn that the major concern currently among staff is the decision to increase prices in the catering facilities in the House of Commons. The concerns can be summarised as follows: that the decision had primarily political, as opposed to genuine cost-saving, motives; that it pre-empted and distorted the current House-wide savings programme; and that it financially penalised staff of the House of Commons, who are facing a two-year pay freeze.

On the first point, in a speech on 8 September 2009, David Cameron –as leader of the Opposition – said the following:

Under Labour, millions of pounds of taxpayers' money has been wasted on funding what can only be described as a cushy lifestyle for politicians. And in the restaurants on the Parliamentary estate, you can treat yourself to a 'Lean salad of lemon and lime marinated roasted tofu with baby spinach and rocket, home-roasted plum tomatoes and grilled ficelle crouton' for just £1.70.

That's all thanks to you - taxpayers' cash subsidising a politician's food and drink.

We all have to eat, we all sometimes want a drink, there's nothing about this job that forces us to eat or drink any more than if we did something else.

So with the Conservatives, the cost of food and drink in Parliament will be increased to match the prices normal people pay in cafes, restaurants and bars around the country.

There can be little doubt that an element of the public mood was being echoed in this statement, coming as it did in the wake of the expenses scandal. But the message that prices should be raised to end "a cushy lifestyle" for politicians was unfortunately incomplete. The provision of subsidised food to approximately 2,000 staff of the House of Commons and hundreds of MPs' staff, secretaries and researchers - many of whom have little or no option as to where and when they eat and virtually all of whom are paid a great deal less than a Member of Parliament – can only on a very loose definition be described as a contribution to "a cushy lifestyle".

On the second point, the House of Commons – like most public bodies – is currently engaged in rigorous attempts to find substantial savings over the lifetime of this Parliament. The four Departments of the House, along with PICT, were originally asked to contribute individual savings proposals to achieve to

**deliver a saving of 9% by 2012/13 against the 2010/11 Estimate of £231million.**

Each department was asked to submit an analysis of the impact of cuts of between 10 and 20 per cent., along with an estimate of the likely impact on service provision of such cuts. Yet the imposition of price rises in an attempt to make a saving estimated at approximately £500,000 meant that there could be no scrutiny or analysis of the kind envisaged for savings proposals from all other Departments – and, indeed, for future savings programmes from the Department of Facilities itself.

In addition, the terms of reference state that, in achieving this financial objective,

**Staff will have been treated openly, fairly and with respect.**

Regrettably, it must be pointed out that at the time of writing the TUS has – despite requests - not received the benchmarking report used in determining the appropriate range of prices for bars, cafes and restaurants in the House, nor the names of the public and private sector organisations used in the benchmarking exercise, nor confirmation of whether an equality impact assessment was carried out as part of the process.

Finally, and most importantly, the politically understandable aspiration to cut the cost of Parliament has in this instance led to House of Commons' staff suffering a financial detriment. Many of the "normal people" to whom the Prime Minister referred last September do indeed eat in unsubsidised cafes and restaurants; we can only wonder as to how many of those "normal people" work in an environment whose working hours are as unpredictable of those of the House, or whether they are subject to the security restrictions that can prevent staff from choosing to eat elsewhere.

Other issues of concern include overcrowding, particularly during recess. Overcrowding is exacerbated during recesses, particularly short ones, when some outlets are closed for the duration. While we appreciate that management has to make the best use of staffing levels available to them, could more be done to prevent the lengthy queues that can build up on these occasions?

On access, the current rules exacerbate tensions between Officers of the House and other members of staff, as Officers have access to many refreshment facilities from which other staff are barred. We favour the opening of these refreshment facilities to staff across the House wherever possible, especially as a number of these facilities are currently under-used.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Lauren Edwards, Political Officer, Unite (T&G) Parliamentary Staff Branch**

The Unite Parliamentary Staff Branch is a trade union representing over 400 members of MP's staff from all political parties, based in both Westminster and constituency offices.

We have consulted our members and would like to bring the following issues regarding catering services in the House of Commons to the attention of the Administration Committee:

### 1. Annie's Bar

- a. The decision to place the House of Commons crèche on the site of the former Bellamy's Bar means that one of the amenities available to staff has been removed.
- b. One of the most under-used resources on the Parliamentary Estate is Annie's Bar, which has been shut for many years and therefore does not provide any revenue for the Estate. This is a fully-fitted bar on prime real estate and it does not make sense to keep this amenity closed.
- c. There is a clear market for another bar - following the closure of Bellamy's Bar, the Sports and Social Bar is often filled to capacity. With bar prices on the Estate now increased in line with the high street, it is likely that this could be a profitable venture.
- d. Therefore we recommend the Administration Committee look into bringing Annie's Bar back into use for MPs' staff, MPs and guests.
- e. The bar could either be leased to the current managers of the Sports and Social or it could be operated as a workers' cooperative.

### 2. Loyalty Scheme

- a. The catering price increases have hit the staff of MPs' particularly hard. Most of our members are on modest salaries - the average salary is around £20,000. This is far below the market-rate for the jobs that we do. Many staff have also had their salaries reduced because of the cut to MPs' staffing budgets by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.
- b. In the past, these lower-salaries were often off-set by cheaper food prices on the Estate. However, following the catering price increases, one of the few remaining perks for staff has been removed. This affects not only the staff of MPs, but also cleaners and other comparatively low-paid staff on the Estate.
- c. Many of our members have told us that they are now purchasing their lunch off the Estate, at the nearby Tesco and other retail outlets. Indeed, some items of food and drink are now cheaper if bought off the Estate. For example, a bottle of Coke in the Debate costs £1.50 compared to £1.04 at the nearby Tesco. Over time, this will lead to a decline in the revenue collected on the Estate.
- d. Therefore, we recommend the Administration Committee look into adopting a 'loyalty card' scheme for staff who work in Parliament. By offering modest discounts, staff will be encouraged to continue to purchase food on the Estate and this will halt any decline in revenue.

### 3. Publicising greater access for MPs' staff

- a. On certain days, MPs' staff are able to access some services that are usually reserved for Members. For example, MPs' staff may book tables in the Adjournment Restaurant on Thursday evenings.
  - b. However many of our members are unaware of these arrangements. We believe it would be in the Estate's interest to more widely publicise opportunities like these, where staff can have greater access to catering services on the Estate.
4. Terrace access arrangements
- a. Some of our members have expressed concern that the access arrangements on the Terrace are being applied inconsistently when staff try to take interns who are non pass-holders onto the Terrace.
  - b. MPs' staff are grateful for the opportunity to access the Terrace for lunch on Fridays and during Recess periods. However, on some days staff with interns who are still waiting for their pass will be allowed access, and on other days they will not.
  - c. This is unfortunate because it means that many staff are unsure of their rights and it denies interns one of the benefits of working in Parliament.
  - d. Therefore, we would like House authorities to consider giving access rights to staff interning for Members.

*October 2010*

**Written evidence submitted by Claire Clancy, Chief Executive and Clerk,  
National Assembly for Wales**

We have on site catering services provided by a contractor, Charlton House, as follows:

Staff restaurant	Breakfast service (Hot and cold cafeteria counters) Lunchtime service (Hot and cold cafeteria counters)
Coffee Shop	Self service tea and coffee, beverages, cakes and confectionery and a range of take away sandwiches, salads and snacks
Members Tea Room 1 service	Beverages, cakes, confectionery, snacks and bar Operates Monday to Thursday during session
Members Tea Room 2 service	Beverages, cakes, confectionery, snacks and bar Operates Tuesday to Thursday during session
Members Restaurant service	Table service restaurant, lunchtime and evening Operates Tuesday to Thursday during session
Public Cafe	Tea, coffee, cakes, confectionery and snacks, assisted counter service

In addition, a range of hospitality services are provided in support of meetings and events on the estate. We also have facilities to provide banqueting for up to 100 guests in the main hall of the Pierhead Building.

The Committee may wish to be aware that due to future budget pressures the above facilities and service levels will be reviewed over the next twelve months to assess future requirements and affordability.

*September 2010*

**Written evidence submitted by Sebastien Mingout, Support Services  
Manager, Facilities Directorate, Northern Ireland Assembly**

Please find below responses to your questions addressed to Mr Stephen Graham,  
Assembly & Review Committee, NI Assembly:

1. We do have on-site catering facilities.
2. They are currently provided by a contractor: Eurest
3. All the food is prepared onsite & the services available are:
  - The Blue Flax Restaurant: main catering outlet for Members, Party & Secretariat Staff: choice of hot/cold food, sandwich and salad bars, chef theatre, hot & cold beverages / cafeteria style
  - Gift Shop: Grab & Go food, hot & cold beverages
  - Members Dining Room & Brasserie: table service restaurants
  - Members Bar: light snacks, hot & cold beverages
  - Private Dining Room & Long Gallery: full banqueting facilities
  - Hospitality: full hospitality brochure, hot & cold beverages
  - Hamper service to our Annexe on the estate: morning snacks, sandwiches
  - Re-launch of our basement lounge to open this week (yet to be named) for informal meeting, break-out area: hot & cold beverages
  - Vending: Confectionary & cold beverages

*September 2010*

**Written evidence submitted by Lianne Robertson, Facilities Manager,  
The Scottish Parliament**

Thank you for your letter dated the 15th September 2010. My colleague Jerry Headley has forwarded it to me as I am the Facilities Manager responsible for the catering services here at the Scottish Parliament.

In answer to your questions, we do have on-site catering facilities and they are provided by a catering contractor.

The facilities we have are listed below for you:

Staff restaurant - provides hot and cold food items for breakfast and lunch (currently 7 days a week , although this is being reviewed)  
on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday evenings during plenary a call order service is available

Coffee bar - provides hot and cold beverages as well as homebaking, confectionary and retail items (such as newspapers)  
this outlet is open Monday to Friday only

Members' Restaurant & bar - provides a lunch and dinner service (during plenary) and lunch only (during recess);  
open Monday to Friday only and on a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday during plenary Members have priority booking although all building users have access.

Public cafe - provides hot and cold food items and beverages within the public area of the building  
open Monday to Saturday

Hospitality and Events - we also provide hospitality and events catering available on a booking system. Mainly provided Monday to Friday but also at weekends on request.

Like you, we are also reviewing our services. I have previously been in contact with Sue Harrison, Director of Catering and Retail services, about this as well as my counterparts at the Northern Ireland Assembly and the National Assembly of Wales. We have yet to make any decisions regarding the services and any changes.

I would be very interested to know how you are planning to consult with Members, their staff, and other service users as I am currently producing a survey focusing on our staff restaurant facility and the offer. Are you looking to use a survey or focus groups? Also, if this is something you have done previously, I would be interested to know how it went and if you got from it what you expected.

*September 2010*

**Written evidence submitted by Helen Chapman, Parliamentary Clerk,  
Department of Culture, Media and Sport**

DCMS closed the on-site catering facility in December last year (2009). There are no plans to re-open the facility.

*September 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Sharon Wroe, HCDC Liaison Officer, Ministry of Defence**

On site catering for UK civilian establishments is mainly provided through Regional Prime Contracts administered by Defence Estates or under Multi Activity Contracts placed by individual Top Level Budget holders.

UK based service personnel are primarily catered for through Catering, Retail and Leisure (CRL) contracts which incorporates Pay as You Dine arrangements. These are being introduced across the UK and account for some 60% of service personnel fed.

For UK Armed Forces personnel 'in barracks' (when personnel are not being fed under CRL contracts) there is a single food supply contract with Purple Foodservice Solutions Ltd managed by the Defence Food Services Team.

The contracts cover the whole range of catering requirements ranging from canteen, restaurant and mess facilities & refreshments for meetings, to vending machines and on-site shops.

The arrangements at the Ministry of Defence's head office, Main Building, may provide a more useful comparison for the Committee. Catering is provided under a PFI contract covering soft and hard facilities services. The PFI contract includes a management charge for the provision of a catering service, which is required to meet certain standards and to be delivered at a cost competitive with local external providers. The catering itself is designed to be self-financing; the income stream is generated through a combination of personal/staff consumption and business support requirements as detailed below. The offering for personal/staff consumption must be competitive with the myriad of alternative outlets in the vicinity; as to the official hospitality, this must be provided in accordance with the official MOD hospitality and allowance rates. The catering contractor is not charged rental or for utilities.

The catering provision in MOD Main Building falls into two categories:

- Support to staff in their personal capacity, for which they pay themselves and comprises:
  - Staff restaurant; providing hot and cold food throughout the working day
  - A small shop; providing sandwiches, snacks, and other useful items throughout the working day
  - Coffee Bar; provided at the contractor's initiative, risk and cost.
  - Vending Machines; drinks and snack machines have been provided throughout the building (the numbers are due to be significantly reduced)
- Support to business, which is paid for by Business Units and comprises:
  - Support to meetings; teas/coffees, biscuits
  - Working lunches; normally buffet style
  - Receptions and events, with drinks, buffet, etc
  - Executive Dining; a higher standard of offering, affording senior staff the opportunity to entertain visitors within the MOD Main Building, with attendant logistic and security benefits.

*October 2010*

**Written evidence submitted by Deborah Lewis, Parliamentary Section,  
Department for Education**

The Department for Education currently provides restaurant facilities to its four headquarter sites in Darlington, London, Runcorn and Sheffield. This is provided via a contracted service by Autograph – the food people, which is part of the Rentokill Initial Group. It comprises:

- A paid hospitality service for business meetings, which is provided to all four sites including hot and cold drinks (tea, coffee and tap water), and working lunches (normally sandwiches, quiche and mini sausages). Special dietary requirements are also catered for;
- The staff catering facility in Darlington and Runcorn includes a limited selection of hot meals, soup, self service coffee and snack vending;
- The staff catering facility in London includes a selection of hot meals, soups, a salad bar, a deli counter, ready made sandwiches, a Costa Coffee provision and snack vending
- The staff catering provision in Sheffield includes ready made sandwiches, soups, a Costa Coffee provision, and snack vending.

Sites providing hot meals also cater for certain key religious dates and the contract caterer may also provide a service for special functions and events which is charged as cost (as it is outside the scope of the contract).

*September 2010*

**Written evidence submitted by J H Allwood, Strategic Estates Adviser,  
Department of Health**

The Department of Health occupies four buildings in Central London and each has a catering facilities, provided by an outsourced contractor Quadrant and managed by our FM company, Interserve. At all but New Kings Beam House, freshly prepared hot and cold food is provided, together with hot and cold (non-alcoholic) drinks. At NKBH, a "deli" service is available, with only very limited hot food.

The facilities are generally open from 08.30 to 16.00 with hot food between 08.30 and 10am and again from 12 noon and 14.00. No subsidy is provided to the contractor, although all accommodation, utilities and repairs/replacement to equipment are funded by DH.

I hope that short summary will assist your review.

*September 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Ann Nixon, Parliamentary Clerk, Ministry of Justice**

The Ministry of Justice does have on-site catering facilities. These are described in further detail below.

The services are provided by a contractor – Eurest Services. Eurest Services recently acquired the contract at Ministry of Justice Headquarters (102 Petty France, London SW1H 9AJ) and at an additional 74 sites across the Ministry of Justice estate. Previously, catering services were provided by another contractor – Compass.

The contract will be run as a nil subsidy contract, which means that all costs incurred on catering will be paid by Eurest Services. The Ministry of Justice will not subsidise the catering contract in any way.

A rigorous bench-marking exercise has been undertaken to ensure that Eurest Services fulfils its commitment to a nil subsidy contract for the Ministry of Justice estate. This means that there will be some increases in prices, but prices will remain at a level that is both competitive with the high street and that will provide value for money. Eurest Services will also review the opening hours of both the restaurant and Costa café (see further below) to ensure the services are meeting the needs of staff in 102 Petty France.

As part of the new contract, Eurest Services have planned a re-branding of the catering facility in 102 Petty France in conjunction with the onsite facilities team. They will be introducing a new food offer under the banner of Whittington's.

Catering services at Ministry of Justice Headquarters, 102 Petty France, currently consist of the following:

### **Coffee bar**

A Costa operated coffee bar, open between 7:30am and 5:30pm, Monday to Friday. The coffee bar serves a selection of hot drinks and confectionary throughout the day, and is very popular with Ministry of Justice staff.

### **Cafeteria**

A cafeteria serving hot and cold food, open between 8:00am and 11:00am for breakfast, and then between 12:00pm and 2:30pm for lunch.

The cafeteria's breakfast 'offer' consists of the following:

- full English breakfast with a selection of 10-12 hot breakfast items;
- omelettes, fried eggs and poached eggs, made to order;
- a smoothie and yoghurt bar;
- continental breakfast;
- cereals and hot porridge; and
- a variety of 'grab-and-go' items suitable for breakfast.

The cafeteria's lunch 'offer' consists of the following:

- a choice of three hot meals, of which one is vegetarian;
- a selection of vegetable accompaniments;
- jacket potatoes, soup, and pre-made sandwiches;

- a 'chef's theatre', where staff can have specific meals cooked by an experienced chef while they wait (e.g. stir fries, pasta dishes);
- a deli with sandwiches made to order;
- a self service salad bar; and
- a variety of 'grab-and-go' items suitable for lunch.

The cafeteria also has a selection of cold beverages and confectionary items, available throughout opening hours.

### **Hospitality**

Ministry of Justice catering services also offer a hospitality menu for customers, available on a daily basis.

The menu consists of the following:

- a selection of beverage trays;
- breakfast options;
- lunch options that range from sandwich platters to hot fork lunches and finger buffets;
- three course sit down meals; and
- a selection of cold beverages, snacks and nibbles.

Catering services can also offer a bespoke menu for customers who have specific preferences.

Most hospitality functions take place within working hours; however, out of hours hospitality services are also available with additional labour cost.

*October 2010*

**Written evidence submitted by Neil Stewart, Parliamentary Clerk,  
Scotland Office**

Many thanks for your letter of 15 September, asking how catering services are provided in other similar organisations. I apologise for the delay in responding.

You asked the following questions—

- Do you have on-site catering facilities?
- Are they in-house or provided by a contractor?
- What services are available (eg cold pre-prepared food, hot cafeteria food, table service restaurant, banqueting)?

The Scotland Office in Dover House doesn't have a canteen or restaurant as such, but does sometimes use external caterers for functions. I am copying this email to Debbie Sahadeo and David Mott, who look after these events. They should be able to assist you with some of your queries.

I trust that this is helpful.

---

Further to Neil's email I write to confirm that we do not have on-site catering, and we do not have any food provision in our building at present. If we do need to cater for an event would bring in caterers or suppliers for this purpose.

*October 2010*

**Written evidence submitted by Glenn Hackney, Parliamentary Clerk,  
Department for Transport**

The Department for Transport comprises a central department and seven executive agencies:

This response covers both the central department and our seven agencies.

Within the Department for Transport, on-site catering services are only available at the Department's main HQ in London, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) sites in Swansea and the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) residential training facility in Bedfordshire.

Department for Transport HQ

- DfT HQ has an on-site catering facility situated in Great Minster House. The service is operated on a commercial no direct subsidy basis.
- The service is provided by Style, a sub-contractor of the DfT HQ Total Facilities Management provider, Amey.
- Style provide a hospitality and restaurant service. The restaurant provides a hot and cold breakfast and lunch café service with a coffee and snack service throughout the day. Style does not provide a table restaurant or banqueting service but if such a need was identified then the contract allows them to provide this.

DVLA

- DVLA has on site catering venues at its Morrision HQ, The Swansea Vale Contact Centre and a small cafe at its Richard Ley Development Centre. The service is operated on a commercial no direct subsidy basis.
- The services are provided by Avenance which is a sub-contractor of the DVLA PFI provider Telereal Trillium.
- Avenance provide a hospitality and restaurant service. The restaurant provides a hot and cold breakfast and lunch café service with a coffee and snack service throughout the day. Avenance does not provide a banqueting service but if such a need was identified then the contract allows them to provide this.

DSA

- DSA has an on site catering facility at its Training & Development Centre in Cardington, Bedfordshire. The service is operated on a commercial non-subsidy basis
- The service is provided by Sodexo - soft facilities provider for Cardington and DSA Nottingham HQ building.
- Sodexo provide a hospitality and restaurant service for the staff and trainees attending the Training Centre, including a 40 bedroom hotel for trainees and DSA staff. The restaurant provides a full English and continental breakfast, hot or cold lunch including healthy and vegetarian option, and a full 3 course evening meal. They also provide tea/coffee vending and sale of light refreshments and confectionary.

*September 2010*

**Written evidence submitted by Stephen Wiles, Parliamentary Clerk,  
HM Treasury**

I can confirm that HM Treasury does have an onsite catering facility which is provided as part of the PFI services via a sub-contractor.

The following services are available:

- Restaurant - serving breakfast and lunch, consisting of a selection of hot and cold food and beverages
- Cafe - open all day, barista served beverages, snacks, sandwiches, salads, pastries and cold beverages
- Deli - open all day, barista served beverages, freshly prepared and pre-made sandwiches, hot food at lunchtime, snacks, cold beverages and sundries.
- Hospitality Service - available all day and for evening functions, provided and extensive range of food and beverages
- Vending Service - vending machines providing hot and cold beverages and a range of snack options.

*September 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Sian Norris-Copson, Chair, Members and Peers Staff Association**

Thank you for giving the Member's and Peer's Staff Association (MAPSA) the opportunity to submit evidence to the Catering Services Review; my apologies for the delay in getting this to you but, as you know, I have been away.

We have received the following comments from our Members, by far the largest number were concerned with the price rises:

### **Price rises**

There is general disappointment that the catering price increases, in an attempt to show that "MPs don't have their snouts in the trough", have disproportionately affected the staff, at a time when the MPs' staffing budget has also been cut.

"We should ensure that popular and busy staff restaurants do not cross-subsidise under-used restaurants reserved for Members. The recent price rises have put many items well above the prices available outside the Palace and we distrust the basis of their benchmark based prices."

"Prices should reflect the volumes sold and the utilisation of the outlet, which is invariably very high for those outlets open to staff."

"It is also worth mentioning that, in advance of the quality cuts and price hikes, the Refreshment Department removed the feedback section of their section of the intranet. Presumably therefore we are expected to like it or lump it?"

### **Opening hours and access**

"It's a shame that Bellamy's Café is closed during recess, as it's always very popular during term time."

"Would it not be better for fewer outlets to remain open as long as they do, and then prices can be kept lower? Surely there is no need for both the Debate and the Terrace to be open into the evening?"

"There should be wider access to the Adjournment and Members' dining room for staff and their guests when there is availability – not just on set days of the week."

"There is also an argument for allowing visitors into the Debate Cafeteria when Parliament is not sitting and the range of catering outlets is severely reduced."

### **Staffing**

"..some of the catering staff on the tills / behind the food counters often look as miserable as if they are attending a funeral!"

### **Quality of food**

"Food across the cafeterias is generally very good."

"The standard of food at the Terrace remains great and they should be complimented on their work!"

“The depressing menus at the Debate are getting worse (cabbage and chorizo soup is appetising to no-one); quality at this outlet continues to decline as prices rise.”

### **Misc**

Several people suggested making the Debate in PCH self-clearing, or as self-clearing as possible, along with tables outside the Debate.

It was also felt that people should be reminded to restore their tables and chairs if they have combined them to party size.

### **Bellamy’s Bar**

There are many comments about the loss of a Bellamy’s Bar, the complete lack of consultation, and the “waste” of taxpayers’ money involved in turning it into a crèche. Other comments include:

“With the closure of Bellamy’s, there is an argument for opening up access to one of the other bars in the House of Commons on peak nights (Thursday / Friday) to prevent overcrowding in the Sports and Social. As Parliament is rarely sitting at those times, I would suggest easing access restrictions in the Strangers Bar on Thursday/Friday nights would be in order.”

We look forward to hearing your comments as a result of our consultation submission.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Frances Allingham, House of Commons staff**

### **1. Introduction**

I am responding to the Administration Committee's request for memoranda for its inquiry into catering services in the House of Commons. I have been employed at the House for 32 years, firstly in the Clerk's Department and now, after amalgamation, the Chamber and Committee Services Department. I am a Senior Committee Assistant at B2 Grade. During my time here both staff of the House and Members' staff have increased considerably which has encouraged more outlets to be built.

The views expressed below are mine own.

### **2. Access**

The subject of access has been a bone of contention to the lower grade staff over the years and has now become a serious problem. We understand the need for Members (and Officers of the House) to have facilities where they can talk and socialise freely without the fear of appearing in the tabloid newspapers the following day. However this does not mean their staff have the same rights. For those of us who's committees meet in, or who's places of work are near, Portcullis House often have difficulty finding a place to have lunch as it is full of all sorts of folk entertaining their friends from outside. The security staff have very little back-up when they try to enforce the rules except on the Terrace, where this summer they have been more diligent. My perception is that since the opening of Portcullis House the facilities there have become a free-for-all.

I think the rules for lunchtime visitors should stay the same but in the evening the Strangers' Dining room might be opened to a certain number of staff. This could be done either booking on a specific day of the week before, or by ballot once a term. It would be nice to be able to entertain our loved ones other than on a Friday lunchtime and would encourage more use of an oft times under-used facility. Similarly the Terrace Pavilion in the summer term is often under used except on Friday where there are always more people wanting to use it than seats available.

As an occupant of 7 Millbank it is great to have the two facilities here. The food in the cafeteria is excellent and the baristas in the Millbank Room do any excellent job. However because of its proximity to 4 Millbank we are now finding ourselves sharing tables with the journalists. This should not be a problem but unfortunately these days even broadsheet staff want to sniff out a story. This can be intimidating to the junior staff who are not very well paid and who have very little experience of dealing with them and little time or money to go elsewhere.

### **3. Needs**

This is very simple. What Members, their staff, Officers, and staff of the House need is somewhere to have breakfast, coffee, lunch, tea and dinner when Parliament is sitting.

During recesses the timings of the facilities available need to be reduced.

I accept that prices have had to be raised and think the use of benchmarking against well known brands and outlets an acceptable one.

#### **4. House of Lords**

Traditionally Members, Peers and their staffs did not use the facilities in each other's House. The exception being MPs who were ennobled. The officers and staff of each House were free to use the others cafeterias and bars. This was very useful as it enabled staff the chance to meet their opposite number to discuss commonality. During the recesses the Lords facilities were often closed for the duration so it helped usage in the Commons.

Personally I think that these unwritten rules should be reinstated particularly for the River Restaurant and bar as most staff in the House of Lords have very few other places to go to.

Unless of course in the future we have a parliamentary refreshment department. Then the access rules could be rewritten. A step too far maybe?

#### **5. Improvements**

1. Cut down the number of choices available on the menus;
2. Consider which facilities need to serve full meals after 8.30 pm when the House is sitting; and
3. Rethink the number of outside pass holders who need to use the facilities particularly in the Recess.

I would like to end by saying that whatever happens the staff in the Refreshment Department have a hard job trying to please everybody. They are to be congratulated in that they do so willingly and pleasantly.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Tom Jones, Members' staff**

As requested on the Parliamentary Intranet, I would like to offer some views and suggestions for consideration by the inquiry of the House of Commons Administration Committee into catering services.

- I feel with the closure of Bellamy's there is an argument for opening up access to one of the other bars in the House of Commons on peak nights (particularly Thursdays) to prevent overcrowding in the Sports and Social. As Parliament is rarely sitting late into the evening on Thursdays, I would suggest easing access restrictions in the Strangers Bar on Thursday nights may be worth considering.
- I think there is also an argument for allowing visitors into the Debate Cafeteria when Parliament is in recess/ not sitting. I understand the restrictions are in place to stop visitors from 12 until 2 and this is sensible when a range of other outlets are open. However, I think when Parliament is not sitting and the range is severely reduced that it would be helpful to allow those without a House of Commons Pass (who are often volunteers or interns) into the Debate Cafeteria.
- We also had one experience trying to get an ale from the Constituency stocked in House of Commons Bars and had difficulty because it was only available in bottles, and not from the central supplier used for procurement. Perhaps there is an argument for stocking an independently-sourced bottled ale on rotation in some of the bars to allow the drinks selection to be better able to reflect the diversity of drinks produced in the country as a whole. I feel that this would improve catering and retail services without requiring the expenditure of additional resources, as many breweries would be delighted to have their beers stocked here.

I hope my comments will be considered as part of the inquiry.

*October 2010*

## Written evidence submitted by Emma Laity, Members staff

My name is Emma Laity and herewith I submit my written evidence to the above inquiry.

I write as an individual, based in the Palace of Westminster, who uses the House catering and retail services several times a day.

My first point concerns the price of catering services.

In his announcement Speaker Bercow stated:

“To save a further £500,000, catering prices in the House will be raised. This will bring cafeteria prices into line with typical workplace venues and bar prices into line with a competitively-priced high street pub chain.”

The way in which prices have increased seems totally haphazard:

- the fish dish in the Debate in Portcullis House has only risen 30p from £3.60 to £3.90, while the pasta dish has gone from £1.25 to £2.95
- a sandwich, a snack and a drink is now over £5 whereas a similar lunch from the Westminster Tesco costs £2 on their meal deal
- a chocolate muffin from the Westminster Café Nero is £1.50 and £1.45 from the Victoria Street Starbucks but is £1.65 from the Despatch Box in PCH

I think it should be made public which ‘typical workplace venues’ the increases were based on, it currently looks as though prices were plucked out the air. I strongly feel that prices should be competitive in order to encourage staff to continue to purchase food in House – I know most of my colleagues are now shopping outside the House at lunch or bringing in their own food. The House could, for instance, introduce a sandwich Meal Deal like that of Tesco and Boots. I also query why prices differ between restaurants. For instance why soup in the Debate is 85p but £1.10 in the Lords River Restaurant. Could there not be a consistency between restaurants?

I strongly feel that staff should have access to tea and coffee making facilities. I do not know anyone who has to pay for a cup of tea in their workplace, let alone the 60p charge we face for the privilege of a tea bag and hot water. Which brings me on to the discrepancy between the facilities available in Portcullis House and the Palace. I have been based in both and find that staff working in offices in the Palace are sorely without kitchen facilities. Why should someone based in PCH have access to a fridge, a sink, an urn and a microwave while staff in the Palace have none of these? Such kitchen facilities are available in all ‘typical workplace venues’ and I strongly think the Palace should accommodate such facilities for staff.

I want to emphasise how fantastic the Despatch Box is for fresh coffee and am extremely pleased that it’s coffee prices have gone unchanged. At busy periods however the queues can be 15 minutes long - could this be wait time be reduced by increasing staff numbers at peak periods?

And lastly:

- Would it be possible to expand catering services in the Debate to include a fresh salad bar like that of the Lords River Restaurant or Bellamy's.
- Is there going to be a replacement bar installed after Bellamy's Bar was closed to make way for a crèche?

I look forward to reading the conclusions the Committee comes to.

*September 2010*

**Written evidence submitted by Linda Rostron, House of Commons staff**

I am writing as me, Linda Rostron, with over 22 years service to the House of Commons as a grade D1 member of staff.

Please let me in, please let me use all the catering facilities of the House that are available to Officers and MPs. Please let me take a guest or two.

I am security cleared.

Have I not proven my loyalty to you by now?

There are others like me who may well want to be included too.

*September 2010*

**Further written evidence submitted by Linda Rostron,  
House of Commons staff**

Blimey hasn't it gone expensive for ordinary members of staff.

For example, Greek yogurt up from 95p to £1.60, soup up to £3 and pizzas up to £5.25 (6th floor cafe 7 Millbank).

I'm not on an MPs salary you know. I've already been efficiency saved through my pay packet.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by Selina Short, Members' staff**

I am writing to put forward my views on catering for staff in the House of Commons. I think that the increased prices in the canteen is too high for most people working in the house of commons to have a decent meal at lunch time. Most people in the House of Commons do not earn very much and unless micro waves are provided for staff, I think the canteens should provide a decent / healthy lunch time hot meal at a subsidised rate, for House of Commons and MPs staff. Currently the hot meal with vegetables in PCH is around £5 which is a lot for people earning £19,000 or £20,000 per year.

It does not make sense to charge the same market prices as around Westminster because the House of Commons catering outlets do not pay market rents and nor are presumably profit making.

I do agree that visitors should however pay open market prices. It is of course an honour to be invited to have lunch in the House of Commons or House of Lords and I see no reason why it should be subsidised.

The solution to this would be that HOC and HOL pass holders pay a reduced rate. Of course eventually a new system could be introduced where the pass is scanned (e.g. at AXA and Prudential). However, in the first instance, and at no great cost, it would not be hard to set up as it just requires separate prices to be imputed into the tills and to be given on showing of the a parliamentary pass. Personally I would suggest a 50% reduction on market prices (rounded up to the nearest penny) charged to guests.

There would be a problem with volunteer staff but there is already a pass system for interns which could just be extended to include food.

MP's earnings are not relevant to the cost of lunches as there are far more staff who work within Parliament on low wages.

Andrea Leadsom MP, for whom I work, was happy for me to write to you on this subject.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)**

### **BACKGROUND**

CPA UK is a high volume user of the facilities of the Catering Department and hosts a large numbers of visitors throughout the year both as delegates at its seminars and conferences and in small numbers on an individual and frequent daily basis. It spent just over £62,000 in the last financial year and in addition to other events, will be spending in excess of £175,000 (plus VAT) at next July's Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference 2011.

### **VALUE FOR MONEY**

CPA UK uses the Dining Rooms for lunches for the 60 or so parliamentarian delegates attending its international parliamentary seminars and conferences each year. Time constraints within the programmes dictate that it can only offer the delegates a 2 course lunch; it is also Branch policy that the lunches be 'dry'. There is, however, a minimum spend in the Dining Rooms which can normally only be met by ordering a 3 course meal with wine. As the Refreshment Department's rules force us to make up the difference, we have to pay money from CPA UK's budget (which comes from Parliament) back to Parliament for facilities that we do not use. This does not make economic sense; neither does the price regime CPA UK is obliged to follow.

The recent sharp increase in prices in the Refreshment Department, together with budgetary constraints within CPA UK's budget, has for the moment forced us to withdraw our requests for Dining Room bookings for future inward delegations. As facilitating Members to meet visiting Members of Parliament in a parliamentary setting is exactly what the Dining Rooms are intended for, it is for consideration that the Refreshment Department adopt a more advantageous and flexible in-house price structure for parliamentary customers such as CPA UK.

### **JOINT OPERATIONS**

Whilst it is not within our remit, as a user of services from both Houses, it is for consideration that value for money may not best served by retaining separate refreshment departments for the House of Commons and the House of Lords. There is frequent duplication of menus and differentials of price, e.g. the price of chips in the River Restaurant as against the price in other outlets. There is scope for greater cooperation and rationalisation across the parliamentary estate. The success of PICT and the Education Service should point the way to a more joint approach in the future.

### **FORMAL DINING**

CPA UK uses both the Churchill Room and Strangers' Dining Room to entertain visiting Commonwealth parliamentarians. Both are very similar. CPA UK has found that its guests do not want a heavy, formal lunch which can take a long time to serve, especially in the Churchill Room, but that they prefer something lighter that is both quicker and healthier. Given the popularity of the

Adjournment that meets these criteria, it is for consideration that a similar facility be established in the main building.

## **BOOKING**

As a major and regular customer, CPA UK considers that it would be useful to have a central booking point for all refreshment outlets.

## **CATERING IN THE CPA ROOM**

CPA UK entertains a large number of visitors in the CPA Room, both singly and in small delegations, and runs high profile receptions, for example at the State Opening of Parliament. It has to call in outside caterers to cater for its requirements. Though this is satisfactory as far as CPA UK is concerned, it could be seen as a missed opportunity for the Refreshment Department to expand its business.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Refreshment Department has a monopoly on the services it provides. However, it should not be viewed as a totally commercial operation as its *raison-d'être* is to offer a service to parliamentarians in the pursuit of their duties as parliamentarians, and its pricing policy should reflect this.

There is considerable scope for rationalisation to offer greater value for money.

*October 2010*

## **Written evidence submitted by George Parker, Chairman, Parliamentary Press Gallery**

The Parliamentary Press Gallery welcomes the Administration Committee's review of catering and retail services in the House of Commons.

### **Access**

Whilst recognising the need of Members for a degree of privacy when dining, we believe that more open access to the various catering areas within the House of Commons is desirable.

Our own experiences are a case in point.

Having historically been reserved for members of the Press Gallery and their guests only, our own catering facilities were opened to all pass holders after a major refurbishment in 2006/7. Whilst it is true to say that some of our colleagues had reservations initially, our experience has been positive. We have not noticed any detrimental impact on our need for quick, well cooked meals on a day-to-day basis; Moncrieff's has become a popular venue but at the same time continues to be available to us to hold regular events such as our monthly lunches. In addition, we understand that it has had a wider impact in helping to ease the load on the Terrace Cafeteria and Portcullis House at busy times and when renovations necessitated the closure of other facilities (e.g. the Terrace Cafeteria in the summer of 2009). The increased access has also helped to demystify a hitherto rather unknown area of the Palace – which can only be a good thing.

The House is attempting to reduce the costs of catering in the current year and beyond and has recently introduced significant price increases in some areas. In the circumstances the economic argument for opening more facilities to more pass holders must be incontrovertible. It is surely incompatible with the objective of reducing costs and maximising income to restrict access to certain facilities for some or all of the time that the House is sitting – effectively turning away income and leaving facilities under-used and staff idle.

Our own experience with the Churchill Room illustrates the point. During the closure of our dining facilities during the refurbishment in 2007 we were temporarily granted limited access to the Churchill Room. Last year, having made the case that the lack of any evening dining facilities in the Press Gallery was having a detrimental effect on the use of Moncrieff's bar, we were also granted access on Monday and Tuesday evenings, although this arrangement ended at the election. Colleagues using the Churchill Room at these times often found that it was seriously under-used and that on some occasions they were the only people dining.

The Churchill Room was very popular with members of the Press Gallery, who would readily use it again were it to be open to them.

We also welcome the recent extension of access to the Terrace on non-sitting Fridays and during Parliamentary recesses.

There seems little doubt that the change in the hours of the House has had the effect of changing the pattern of use of catering facilities across the Palace, and

in particular of decreasing take-up in the evenings. Taken with the need to reduce costs and increase income, and the drive to make Parliament a more open and inclusive place, it seems logical to lift access restrictions such as those on the Churchill Room and Adjournment and open them up to a larger body of people.

We would therefore suggest to the Committee that it gives consideration to opening, for example, the Churchill Room and the Adjournment to all pass holders at all times and that the restrictions on certain seating areas within other facilities (e.g. the Atrium in Portcullis House) be removed.

We would also ask that the Committee publish a clear set of rules for access and that they be consistently applied.

### **Needs**

The needs of the various groups using the Commons catering outlets will necessarily vary, but undoubtedly there is a need across the board for the quick and efficient service of well cooked food from early morning until well into the evening. In addition there is a need for 'grab and go' service and for places serving refreshments that can be used for informal meetings or for wi-fi access. The popularity of the Despatch Box and atrium areas in Portcullis House proves the point.

### **Relationship between Lords and Commons Catering Services**

We have no strong views on the relationship between the House of Lords and the House of Commons catering services other than to suggest that there must at least be potential for closer collaboration to result in savings for both Houses.

*October 2010*

## **Further written evidence submitted by the Parliamentary Press Gallery**

As I mentioned to you at the end of your last committee meeting on Monday this week, members of the Press Gallery are extremely keen to come forward with suggestions for the greater use of Moncrieff's self-service cafeteria.

We understand you are considering options for cost saving and income generation across the House services. We also understand that it is the view of the House Catering & Retail Services that the self-service cafeteria and waiter service operation is uneconomic and consequently should be closed, although the café/bar would remain open. We regret this rather negative approach and would very much like the opportunity to discuss in more detail how we could co-operate with Sue Harrison and her team in increasing trade in Moncrieff's.

However, we do appreciate that the waiter service element of Moncrieff's – the Bistro as it is known – is underused and might, with regret, accept that this should be discontinued. However, as this is the only place where members of the Press Gallery can entertain guests to lunch, closure would only be acceptable if we were able to have access to the Adjournment and the Churchill Room for lunch and dinner. Our members have a regular and genuine need to entertain as part of their jobs and without Moncrieff's Bistro there is nowhere on the Parliamentary estate where they can do this.

We feel it is imperative that the rest of the self service cafeteria should remain open. It is used not only by members of the Press Gallery, for whom quick and easy access to a hot meal is essential when working to deadlines, but as a welcome alternative to the queues at the 'honeypot' venues in Portcullis House and the Terrace by other passholders, thereby easing the load on those venues.

In addition, Moncrieff's is a fundamental part of the working life of the Press Gallery. It is used for a wide variety of functions, including monthly lunches at which key Parliamentarians, including recently both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, have been recent speakers, and regular receptions – for example:

- the Press Gallery's successful schools writing competition (run in conjunction with the Parliament Education Service);
- an event to welcome the current Speaker as Hon President of the Press Gallery;
- two events to welcome new Members to Parliament last May);
- regular events for government and opposition advisers, political think tanks and so on;
- internal social events, such as a very popular quiz night.

Were the cafeteria to close, alternative venues would have to be found for all these functions.

I had a very productive meeting with Sue Harrison earlier this week during which we discussed her proposals for consideration by your committee. Mrs Harrison

mentioned that in the event of closure, the space could be used as a venue for catering staff meals at lunchtime. It seems illogical to fire up the kitchens for meals taken between 11.00 and 12.00 and then not to keep the area open for normal lunch time service.

We have a number of positive suggestions for increasing footfall through Moncrieff's:

- An additional 'themed' lunch time to build on the success of the 'fish and chip Fryday'
- A venue for political meetings, political book launches and signings, and club dinners. A number of Members have told us they would be unhappy with the Churchill Room being set aside for functions. Moncrieff's could be considered as an alternative venue.
- A place for Parliamentary groups to welcome visitors and delegations to Westminster
- That consideration be given to keeping the cafeteria open all year round accompanied by a serious marketing exercise in order to increase customer loyalty and habitual use amongst specific groups of passholders, e.g. the police and security staff;
- Political breakfast briefings, such as we have undertaken in the past.

The Press Gallery is an historic and integral part of Parliament, attributes which we are sure could be used as an effective marketing tool in a positive campaign to develop it as a venue and maximise revenue. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss these matters further with you before your committee reaches its final conclusions for recommendation to the House of Commons Commission.

*January 2011*

## **Further written evidence submitted by the Parliamentary Press Gallery (CS 49)**

Having had an opportunity to give the matter further consideration we remain convinced of the viability of Moncrieff's cafeteria, although we are prepared to accept that the waiter service component is not economic. As discussed, we would accept the closure of this particular aspect of our catering facility if members of the Press Gallery are then able to reserve tables at another restaurant, for example the Churchill Room, both at lunch times and in the evenings.

With regard to the self-service element I think you will be aware of how strongly we feel about the need to retain this at lunch times for all passholders, as at present. Apart from the obvious advantage for ourselves, Hansard and the Commons staff – such as our Attendants and Doorkeepers – who are based in this part of the Palace, Moncrieff's has become a valued venue for staff from across the estate as an alternative to the long queues regularly experienced in the Terrace and in Portcullis House. Footfall has been increased by the introduction of feature days, e.g. the fish and chip Fridays, and we are sure there would be scope to develop other themed events. It is also the case that were any of the larger venues to close temporarily for refurbishment Moncrieff's is ideally placed to stay open throughout recesses to take up the displaced custom, as has already happened in the recent past when the Terrace Cafeteria was renovated.

We understand from Sue Harrison that she is considering using the cafeteria as a lunch venue for catering staff from across the Commons. Given that they need to eat their meals before 12.00 noon we can see no reason why the self-service cafeteria could not then continue as normal.

In urging your committee to recommend the retention of Moncrieff's we are of course aware of the financial pressures and have therefore been giving serious consideration to how it might be developed as a function room.

As you know, Moncrieff's is already used monthly for Press Gallery lunches to which senior Parliamentarians are invited as the guest speakers. There are other occasions; for example, it is used by the Newspaper Society for their annual lunch.

In the evenings it is the venue for leaving parties, our 'Chairman's Pint', and the variety of receptions we hold for – amongst others – new Members (after an election), the Speaker and special advisers.

However, as a venue it could be attractive to external party or event organisers, given its location inside of the most famous buildings in the world. Companies such as Dods, which are intimately connected to Parliament and with whom we already work closely, organise dozens of parliamentary events every year, and are already keen to try to find ways to use the Moncrieff's space.

From their point of view the advantage of Moncrieff's is that MPs are much more likely to attend an event if it is held on the parliamentary estate and the event would not need to be sponsored by a Member as is the case with all other function rooms.

The Press Gallery has an extensive picture archive which could be extended to the entrance and staircase leading to the bar/restaurant, highlighting the historic associations for guests. We also have a number of fascinating artefacts which could be placed on display if secure units could be found them.

In conclusion, we hope the Administration Committee would agree with us that Moncrieff's is a venue with potential and that to close it would be an opportunity lost to develop a revenue stream which is of benefit to the Parliamentary budget as a whole.

If we can provide any more information please don't hesitate to let us know.

*March 2011*