

Management Board

DIS/DCCS co-location in 14 Tothill St

Paper from John Bengner and Mark Hutton

For the meeting on 13 November

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to ask the Management Board to agree that:
 - Subject to the successful evaluation of the current phase 2 pilot, the Research Directorate (DIS) and the Committee Directorate (DCCS) should be co-located;
 - The co-location should be in 14 Tothill St and occupy the whole building; and
 - Preparations should begin now so as to achieve full co-location before the first meeting of Parliament after the expected 2015 General Election.
2. The Board is being asked to make this decision before the conclusion of the pilot phase 2, so as to ensure that necessary preparatory work can be done to achieve the completion date of May 2015.

Consultation and equality analysis

3. There has been consultation with Committee Office and DIS staff (as well as the two pilots). The Accommodation team in Facilities has been closely involved. There have been discussions with the Director of Change in DHR&C. The DGs of DCCS, DFacilities and DIS have been consulted. The Clerk of the House visited the co-location pilot in summer 2013.
4. An equality analysis will be conducted as part of the evaluation of the phase 2 pilot. The increased flexibility of working arrangements in Tothill St is expected to have a modestly positive equality effect.

Background

5. Both DIS and the Committee Office rely on subject specialists. Broadly speaking DIS specialists provide research and analytical services to individual Members (including Opposition frontbenchers); Committee Office specialists support their committees. For many years there have been informal contacts between the two. More recently a number of DIS specialists have been loaned to committee teams for fixed periods. These contacts have brought many benefits but they have not got over the physical and to some extent cultural challenges which prevent effective exploitation of the synergies between the two groups. In fact they have highlighted the difficulties of creating really strong and effective working relationships across departmental barriers.
6. The potential role of co-location in breaking down those barriers has been recognised for many years. The Scottish Parliament research service was designed in 1999 so that its specialists would support committees, but without full co-location. The Tebbit review in 2007 recommended that closer working between the Clerk's Department and the Library should be developed further. A proposal for co-location in 7 Millbank reached the planning stage in 2009, but for various reasons (including the reappraisal of the urgency of converting 1 Derby Gate into offices for Members) it was not implemented.
7. Plans to refurbish Derby Gate, however, remain a priority with the accompanying requirement that alternative accommodation must be found for the DIS staff who currently occupy it. Following discussions between DIS and DCCS in autumn 2012 an initial co-location pilot was set up in April 2013 in otherwise empty space on the sixth floor of Tothill St. That pilot involved two select committee teams (Energy and Climate Change and Science and Technology) and the Science and Environment Section of DIS.
8. It has been a great success. An independently validated evaluation conducted from April to July 2013 found:
 - Significant improvements in the flow of information between teams, an increased understanding of other teams' work and an observed increase in collaborative activity.
 - Staff attitudes shifted from being mildly positive to very positive over the course of pilot phase 1.

- Noise in an open plan office was less of a problem than expected but availability of quiet drafting rooms and meeting rooms was considered essential.
 - Lack of storage space was less of an issue than had been anticipated and had not resulted in any particular problems (the two committees were 'paperless').
 - The location of the Tothill Street offices did not cause significant problems but a location further from the Palace would.
 - Co-location of further teams at Tothill Street and the provision of a full canteen to maximise collaborative activities and reduce isolation were seen as essential.
9. In October 2013 the pilot was expanded with the addition of four more committee teams and two more DIS sections, occupying both the sixth and seventh floors. This enlarged pilot will be evaluated (again with external validation) to report in December. Initial feedback has been very positive; sufficiently so to persuade the DGs of the two Departments that it is right to take a decision now, in principle, to move to full co-location.

Benefits

10. When the House returns after the 2015 general election, the two key information based services to Members will be working alongside each other in modern open plan offices. They will be working flexibly across team and departmental boundaries, sharing knowledge and research to maximise their efficiency and effectiveness. They will have the skills and technology to communicate and collaborate electronically with each other, with Members and with the wider public, without losing the capacity to provide hard copy to those who still require it. Their outputs will be 'digital first'; available electronically in a variety of formats, suitable for different devices and complying with modern accessibility standards.
11. Not all of this will be delivered by co-location alone, but co-location could be a critical enabler for other programmes which are modernising processes and working arrangements in both departments.
12. Specific benefits identified from our experience of the pilots so far include:

- More effective: active sharing of knowledge improves the quality of output to both committees and individual Members;
- More efficient: staff understanding of what each other are working on reduces unnecessary duplication, increases opportunities to make useful connections between inquiries/topics and allows provision of temporary cover during staff absence;
- Members and staff are better informed;
- Two of the core business departments/directorates of the House will be (and will be seen to be) working in a modern, effective and collaborative manner;
- In particular there is the opportunity to break the link between teams and management structures: teams can be assembled informally for specific tasks/inquiries;
- Sharing a building with Outreach and the public information team (see below) will allow us to exploit their respective expertises in engaging with the public;
- Working in open plan modern offices will reinforce the development of more flexible working patterns between teams and with the new Committee Office Web and Publications Unit;
- Moving two critical Member-facing parts of the organisation into modern open-plan and flexible accommodation would be a very visible reinforcement of the Management Board's aspirations for our future use of accommodation and working practices.

13. The Board's view on the case for co-location, and the desired timing, will help to shape the Strategic Outline Programme Case for the refurbishment of the Northern Estate that is presently being developed by the Department of Facilities. DG Facilities is planning to bring an illustrative, strawman programme, to the November Management Board (MB2013.P.117).

Risks

14. The principal identified risks are around
- The transition itself (including finding alternative accommodation for displaced teams)
 - The limited scope/extent of the pilot
 - Perceived inconsistencies in terms and conditions and/or grading.

Transition

15. Evidence from the pilots suggests that physically moving committee teams is straightforward. Although some Library sections do have substantial hard copy holdings, not all of these need to be available in the offices in which they work. DIS is currently reviewing its collections policy, which is likely to lead to rationalisation, better use of existing space in the Palace and Broad Sanctuary and possible procurement of further off-site storage.
16. During the transition period both the Committee Office and the Library research sections will be split across several sites. Tothill St is about 10 minutes walk from both 1 Derby Gate and 7 Millbank. Staff involved in the pilots have commented that the separation reduces the opportunities for informal contacts with colleagues and on occasion has been a disincentive to attendance at office meetings etc. So far these are judged to be inconveniences, but a prolonged transition period could entrench divisions and reduce informal collaboration and the sharing of best practice.
17. For both departments the move to open plan in a shared space with the other is a cultural as well as a physical move. As noted above the cultural change is in line with the Management Board's objectives for the service. Evidence from the pilot phases suggests that it is being embraced by the vast majority of staff. The Change Directorate in DHR&C have offered their support and assistance. In addition, a clear communication strategy will be developed.
18. The House is in the process of procuring a substantial decant building, planned to contain more than enough space to accommodate those staff currently in Tothill St. Depending on when that building becomes available it may be necessary for some staff (probably in PICT and WIS) to be decanted first to (probably) 7 Millbank and then at a later date to the new building if the proposed timetable for the co-location is to be achieved.

Pilot scope

19. The current (enlarged) pilot is of six committees and three sections, overall around a quarter of the total staff who might be involved in a full co-location. Most of them come from a limited range of subject areas (environment, science, business and

transport). We believe they are broadly representative of the whole, but cannot rule out that co-locating other committees/sections may be more challenging.

20. There are other sections/offices in both departments which we have not included in the pilots, but we would like to see included in the full co-location. These include the Scrutiny Unit, POST, the Outreach and Public Information teams and Media and Communication Units in both departments.

Terms and conditions

21. Differences in terms and conditions and in grading structures between the two departments was one of the principal risks identified ahead of the first pilot. But so far it has been the dog that didn't bark. In fact the visibility that teams have of each other's working patterns has helped to dispel myths (that committee teams are never in the office in recesses; that Library staff all knock off at 5pm).

22. Similarly issues around grading differences (Library specialists are A2, committee specialists mostly B1s; committee clerks are SC1 or A2, Library heads of section A1s) have not been exacerbated by co-location. An A2 committee clerk has for the first time just been appointed to an A1 Library head of section role, having been co-located with that team. Co-location is likely to increase staff development and career opportunities.

23. There is a low likelihood but potentially high impact risk that these issues might flare up in a full co-location, but the evidence so far suggests that any such flare up would be localised and manageable rather than widespread and damaging to operational effectiveness. Support from the Change Directorate will help to mitigate this risk.

Governance

24. A programme board has been set up, chaired by Patsy Richards who is also SRO. Its objectives are to

- Deliver the second phase of the pilot (achieved in early October)
- Commission and oversee the assessment of that pilot (external expertise has been procured - due to report end December)

- Determine the resources required to achieve a full co-location (financial and other)
- Draw up a plan to deliver the co-location within the timescale agreed (see below).

Timescale

25. The Board is asked to agree that the co-location be completed by May 2015 for the following reasons:

- It will be in place for the expected start of the new Parliament
- The experience of the pilots has created both enthusiasm and momentum for the proposal which could easily be lost if there was now a hiatus or delay
- The business benefits of co-location, in terms of increased efficiency and effectiveness and opportunities for continuous improvement in working practices will be delivered more quickly
- The disadvantages to both DIS and the Committee Office of being spread across two sites (three for the Committee Office) will be felt more acutely the longer they persist
- It assists the delivery of wider accommodation and estate strategies, for example by freeing up cellular accommodation in 7 Millbank which could be used for Members' decant space
- Moving the Committee Office in late 2015 (when new committees have just been appointed) or 2016 would risk causing damaging interruptions in service to Chairs and committees at that early stage in a Parliament when it is particularly important to build Members' trust and confidence in committee teams.

26. The pilots have shown how straightforward it is to move relatively small groups of committee and Library staff. There is spare capacity in both 7 Millbank and Tothill St. In advance of the House's planned procurement of a substantial decant building, this capacity could be used to enable a series of smaller moves over the next 12 to 15 months. There would be business and morale benefits in moving more committee and Library staff into Tothill St as soon as possible. The staff currently occupying floors 3, 4 and 5 could be moved into existing accommodation in 7 Millbank (some freed up by earlier moves into Tothill St).

Requirements and costs

27. The main entrance of Tothill St currently closes at 7pm. If fully occupied by the Committee Office and DIS it should be open 24 hours a day (as 7 Millbank currently is).
28. The building needs to have wifi throughout. 23 committees have so far agreed to electronic-only distribution of papers. It is our intention that by the start of the next Parliament it should be standard practice for committees to circulate papers electronically through a web-based application accessible on any device.
29. There is a business case for extending the catering provision. Firstly both committee staff and DIS staff have a regular business need to entertain guests. These include external specialists, including prospective and appointed committee specialist advisers, parliamentary colleagues, prospective witnesses and others who are assisting with inquiries and Members. Secondly a full catering service would be an important/influential pull factor for those staff who are nervous or otherwise reluctant to make the move.
30. The costs of the pilot phase 2 (largely the works to adapt the sixth and seventh floors) were budgeted at £208,000 but the programme is projected to underspend. Other floors have fewer partitions in place. The cost of extending the reception hours from 6pm to 7pm has so far been absorbed.
31. An assessment of the costs for the move itself will be produced by the programme board and should be available by the end of the year. It is not possible to construct an estimate now by scaling up from the cost of the works for the phase 2 pilot because those costs relate to works needed only on the 6th and 7th floors. The costs of moving committee and Library staff into Tothill St should be very modest (they have been so far). It is expected that the only immediate works costs will be to reconfigure desk layouts. The costs of moving others out depends on their demands (eg works to open up 7MB) and the availability of the anyway required decant building. The proposed timescale may have the effect of bringing forward costs which would otherwise be incurred under other programmes (eg moving staff out of Derby Gate or into a decant building).

32. Apart from the cost of the enhancements described above (and the possibility of future requirements set out below) there are no foreseen continuing costs from this programme. It is likely that any additional DIS storage costs will be incurred in any case under its need to move and revised collections policy.

33. The programme board will also draw up estimates for the longer term requirements for catering and security.

Longer term

34. Pressing ahead with the co-location as proposed in this paper will make it difficult, perhaps impossible, to make any significant changes to the lay out or character of the accommodation ahead of the move. There are likely therefore to be changes which will need to be made once the co-location programme is completed. The programme board could be asked to prepare a list of such changes with associated business cases as appropriate.

Legal and House of Lords implications

This paper raises no legal issues and there are no House of Lords implications.

6 November 2013