

Management Board

Members' Centre: update

Special Adviser on Member Relations

Purpose

1. The purpose of this note is to **inform** the Board of progress towards the opening of the Member's Centre in Portcullis House.

Decisions

2. None. This paper is to note.

Background

3. The Chief Executive informed the Administration Committee on 4 March that a Service Delivery Centre for Members and Members' staff was being planned for the ground floor of Portcullis House. He told the Committee that all Departments would be represented in the Centre, and that it should be in place by summer. He also said that the Centre would be developed next session as we learn what Members want from it.
4. A Project Board was appointed to take the project forward. It has met weekly since March.
5. The Project Board consists of Paul Silk (Chair), Bob Twigger (DIS), John Collins (DCCS), Matthew Taylor (PICT), Ruby Beech (DF), Dan Gorman (DR), Marianne Cwynarski (OCE) and Mark Baptist (PICT – Project Manager).
6. The emphasis of the Project Board has been on creating the first iteration of a facility which will make the work of Members and their staff easier, while making the minimum number of assumptions about Members' wishes and avoiding the need for significant expenditure. The intention is to bring to one location a unified service which offers expert help across the range of the House's administration.

Physical location and opening plans

7. The Centre will be located in the present e-Library. It is intended to look and feel professional and inviting, and the space is designed to be flexible and adaptable.

8. Feedback from the Administration Committee has led to the adoption of a low-cost option, with minimal building works. This has meant that early ideas to take down the wall between the e-Library and the Vote Office have been put on hold. The PCs along the east wall will be upgraded and will remain for use by Members and their staff.
9. The e-Library will close on 24 June, and the Centre will open on 1st July. This will allow three weeks of operation before the summer recess, followed by a period of consolidation and detailed staff training over the summer (the Centre will remain open). From its opening and through the autumn, the Centre will actively seek Members' views, and those of their staff, as to how the Centre could be improved. Improvements will be continuously implemented where they are feasible and affordable.
10. Initial opening hours for the Centre will be as follows:

Sitting weeks

Monday 10 – 8

Tuesday 9 – 8

Wednesday 9 – 7

Thursday 9 – 6

Friday 9 – 4

Recess weeks

Every day 10 – 4

These can be altered as experience of usage develops. Not all services, at least initially, may be available all of the time.

Delivery of services through the Centre

11. Three newly recruited front line staff will act as “receptionists plus” in the Centre. Recruiting the right people for these jobs was seen as mitigation of a key risk. Good choices have been made from strong fields. These staff will answer many questions themselves, and will give out information on House services, register and act on issues raised by Members, and do tasks such as book meeting rooms. They will also act as signposts to other expert advisers.
12. Front-line staff will, however, be trained not to respond to queries which should more properly be directed elsewhere. It will be important that they do not purport to give advice on matters they do not fully understand. Either they will refer people on to the second line (see next paragraph), or (especially in the case of DCCS services) to staff in Departments. For instance, a Member asking about a petition will be told to speak to the (named) Clerk and told what her telephone number is and how to find her. The receptionist staff will not purport to tell the Member whether the petition is in order.

13. The Centre will also contain second line staff from the different House Departments who will be available to give more detailed assistance to Members and their staff. Each Department has decided which staff it should deploy in the Centre. For **DCCS**, the only staff will be the present Vote Office staff, though the Department will review this as Members' usage of the Centre becomes clearer. **DIS** will continue to use present e-Library staff, supplemented on a regular rota by senior staff, including the Director General and Directors. **DF** will be represented by the Director General (who will base himself in the Centre) and a range of other staff. **DR** will field the staff who normally deal with telephone queries on pay and allowances. **PICT** will provide a slightly scaled-down version of PICT local (the branch in Norman Shaw will close), with regular attendance of the Director and senior staff.

14. Services to be offered between the first and second lines in the Centre are as follows. (The Board will note that these are set out thematically rather than by Department: this fits with the Centre's goal of representing a unified service):

- Business Centre type facilities
 - PCs and hot-desking facilities
 - WiFi network access
 - Telephones
 - seating/reading area
 - daily newspapers, information
 - displays/demonstration area
 - leaflets and other documentation from all Departments (key leaflets on display; others available)
- Pay and allowances
 - Salaries and allowances advice
 - Budgetary forecasts relating to Members' annual allowance expenditure
 - Progress of individual claims and payments
 - Completion of claims/Travel card statements
 - Members will be able to access
 - claim forms, new employee starter packs,
 - claim submissions
 - names and contact numbers for specialist services
 - basic advice regarding insurance, child care vouchers, Members' staff training and Short Money
- Enquiries, Information and Bookings
 - Answering Library research/reference enquiries from Members and their staff and referring these to specialists
 - Catering and Banqueting
 - Tours (Big Ben, Central Tours, Education Service)
 - Parliamentary mail service

- House stationery and use of the crowned portcullis
 - Ballot for room bookings e.g. Jubilee and Attlee Suite and Upper Waiting Hall exhibitions
 - Online resources
 - Booking of conference, meeting and interview rooms
 - Booking of Library training/talks
 - Requests for filming and photography permits
 - Book and video collections
- Advice and assistance with ICT issues and equipment including:
 - Help with ICT difficulties
 - Resolution of technical issues
 - Discussion of ICT needs
 - Taking orders for ICT equipment (e.g. PCs, printers, laptops, monitor, PDAs) Access tokens
 - Advice and assistance with Mobile computing
 - Display Equipment
 - IT training – including Drop-In themed sessions

Other Issues

15. The Centre is intended for Members and their staff. Others who at present use the e-Library as an Internet café are being offered alternative facilities in the Derby Gate reading room (where the number of PCs has been doubled) or in their administrative units. The Administration Committee has agreed that Peers, former Members and Members of the European Parliament (who are currently entitled to use the e-Library) should retain **access** to the PCs, as well as House staff on official business (for example, committee staff accessing the Internet on behalf of a committee meeting in Portcullis House).
16. **Consultation** with users is recognised as vital if the Centre is to be a success. The Project Board Chair has appeared before the Administration Committee, and has held regular meetings with the Committee's Chairman. He has also consulted with the two representative groups of Members' staff (who are very supportive). When the Centre is open, consultation with users about ways of making improvements will be continuous.
17. A **communication** plan has been developed. A feature has been lead item on the Intranet; there has been a series of communications to House staff; an event to promote the new service will take place in Portcullis House Atrium on 18 June; bold temporary signage will be mounted on the outside wall of the Centre through July; the Chief Executive will write to all Members in the week before opening; a reception will be held at the Centre on 1 July.

18. The Centre will be an important source of **management information**, both about its own usage, but also about issues of concern to Members. It will be important to collect, analyse and act on this information.
19. It was originally proposed that the **reception desk** at the top of the escalators in Portcullis House should be closed, and its functions transferred to the Members' Centre. However, it has been decided that this might have appeared to reduce services to Members. The desk will therefore remain open as a Portcullis House reception desk. This matter will be reviewed. Confusion between the two desks remains a risk.
20. **Risk** has been regularly reviewed at Board meetings. An important risk is that the Centre will not prove as useful to Members as we anticipate. To mitigate this risk, it will be vital to adapt what the Centre offers, and how it offers it, as the needs of Members and their staff become apparent. It will also mean that we should contemplate the closure of the Centre if it proves not to meet Members' needs. A counterbalancing risk is the "genie out of the bottle" - that the Centre will lead to alterations in Members' behaviour and expectations (and those of their staff) that we will not be able to fulfil. One other risk of which the Management Board should be aware is that the Centre might be swamped if an unforeseen crisis occurs – for example, a general ICT failure affecting Members and their staff.
21. The Project Board believes that it will be important for it to remain in place after the Centre is opened so that it can plan for its development in an agile way.

Paul Silk
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