

## Management Board

### Response to the 2009 Members' Survey of Services

*Paper by the Head of the Office of the Chief Executive*

#### Purpose

1. This paper proposes ways in which the results of the 2009 survey of services might inform business planning, in addition to suggesting next steps and key lessons learned from the survey.

#### Actions for the Board

2. The Board is asked to:
  - 2.1. Consider the implications of the 2009 survey of services results for business planning and the House Service's priorities.
  - 2.2. Approve the proposed next steps.

#### Consultation

3. A draft of this paper has been reviewed by the Survey of Services Project Chair (Bob Twigger) and the Head of Central Communications ([s.40]).

#### Background

4. In the light of the recommendation of the Tebbit Review the House Service has committed to conducting regular 'rolling' surveys of Members. Following a competitive tender process, FDS International are currently contracted to provide 3 surveys on a roughly annual basis.
5. The 2009 survey did not achieve as high a response rate as in 2007 perhaps because of the coincidence of the survey with the unofficial publication of information about Members' allowances. The survey period was originally set as 27 April to 15 May, but was extended to provide respondents with a greater opportunity to participate. Overall, 160 Members (25%) completed the questionnaire; those Members responding were broadly representative of the House (by party, role, age and service).
6. At its July meeting the House of Commons Commission agreed that the survey report could be published on the internet. It was decided that the timing of publication should coincide with the return of the House in October at the same time as they are presented to the Administration Committee (who commissioned the survey).

#### High-level results

7. The survey indicates improvements in Members' opinion of services provided by the House Service since the 2007 survey. Taking all House Services into account, 60% of Members, and 55% of Members' staff, are satisfied with the services provided; only 4% of Members, and 2% of their staff, are dissatisfied. A little over half of Members are 'very satisfied' with the House Services overall, with a similar proportion of Members' staff reporting the same
8. The qualitative phase of the survey was informed by early results. The Survey of Services project board agreed five priority areas for questioning by FDS after examining preliminary data from the quantitative survey. These priorities were:
  - Security;
  - Cleaning;
  - The environment;
  - Information and communications technology; and
  - Working with constituency staff.

These priority areas have also informed the recommended areas for consideration below.

9. The survey questions around which services are most *important* to Members were useful, not least because they add context to responses that express dissatisfaction. While there were complaints about cleaning as in 2007, Members do not consider cleaning services to be among the more important for them to be able to carry out their duties as Members. The top three priority services for Members according to the survey are: 1<sup>st</sup> Procedural services; 2<sup>nd</sup> ICT; and 3<sup>rd</sup> Information and research services provided by the Library and POST.
10. Most respondents feel that the House of Commons Service is devoting appropriate resource levels to each of the four corporate core tasks.
11. The core services that both Members and their staff are most likely to feel need more attention / resources should be devoted are 1) 'advice and services for individual Members and their staff'; and 2) the 'promotion of public knowledge and understanding of the work and role of Parliament', with over a third of Members and staff believing this. The survey results in this area suggest that, if priorities are to be changed as part of the business planning process, the Board may wish to consider allocating more resources to core tasks 2 and 3. Examples might include constituency services, new information services, and outreach. On the other hand, the survey confirms that Members value our core procedural and research services, which suggests that we should continue to provide sufficient investment to those areas in order to maintain quality. **The survey results provide food for thought about resource priorities rather than a clear mandate for change.**

### Suggested context and use of the survey

12. The first goal set for the House Service is to make Members feel they are receiving an excellent service from all parts of the House Service, and an annual survey is a significant opportunity to test success against this goal. However, it is an imperfect measure – the results (or response rate) can be affected by the issues of the day, and responses from Members are a single instance of their opinion.
13. It is important to ensure that we have mechanisms to test progress *between* the annual surveys (our bellwether indicators and gathering of informal feedback), which will support the second goal set for the House Service (to deliver continuous and measurable improvement to the services we provide). Further thought needs to be given to our bellwether indicators – is there anything that could be measured that is not being used, and are those measurements already being made 1) actually of use; and 2) attuned to the annual survey of services? The OCE will take this forward as part of the continuing development of the balanced scorecard.
14. The survey of services should also be a *tool* to support and inform planning, enabling us to assess Members' priorities through information that is representative of their opinion.
15. Rather than create a new and separate 'action plan' for the results of the 2009 survey, it is suggested that the resulting work and desired outcomes should be achieved through the business planning process. The results of the survey should be circulated, taken into account at all levels and be reflected in planning. This is not to say that the results of the survey should necessarily prescribe particular courses of action (given their limitations), but rather be used intelligently as a check against corporate-, departmental- and team-level plans. In addition, the survey may help the Board to reflect on its corporate priorities.

### Possible areas for action

16. There are **four** main areas for action suggested below. These have a wide scope and involve multiple departments of the House.

#### 17. **Area 1:** Constituency staff & services.

The survey suggests that the House Service should consider its approach and priority given to the services that it provides to constituency offices and Members' constituency staff. Current thinking and experience with the recent induction of Chloe Smith MP indicates that the new intake of Members may be more focussed on constituency matters, or consider the constituency as their 'base'.

There was also feedback in the survey that constituency staff feel ill-served by the House Service (although it is recognised that they cannot

expect to receive the *same* services as Westminster-based staff). This area involves PICT, DIS and DR at the very least. Specific issues could include changed ICT hardware and support for constituency offices, remote training and information consultancy for constituency-based staff. The General Election Planning Group (GEPG) is touching on some of these themes, but constituency services as a whole is beyond its remit. This is an area that would benefit from central coordination. **While recognising that the outcome of the Kelly Committee may affect this area, the Board might consider whether to increase our support for Members and their staff in the constituency.**

#### 18. Area 2: ICT and the delivery of services through new channels.

The survey suggests that ICT is both the largest cause of irritation among Members and the second most important in enabling them to conduct their work. At first sight, this might suggest that we should shift resources to this area. However, many complaints were related to 'known issues' (a particularly troublesome model of printer and the remote access service), and it is thought that the occurrence of the 'Conficker' virus immediately before the survey period contributed to negative results. As stated by FDS in their presentation to the Board, in the wider context of industry-standard levels of satisfaction PICT performs well. Nevertheless, the survey results reinforce the case for ICT continuing to be a priority area for the House Service, and suggest that funding should not be cut in this area.

The 'known issues' are already being addressed by PICT and there may be additional 'quick wins' (e.g. the ability to receive their Parliamentary email on their personal Blackberry or iPhone which PICT are currently developing, and possible changes to the Members' ICT offering are being investigated).

The House Service risks failure in the longer term if it does not plan to meet Members' future needs in this area. Members will have more challenging technical expectations in the near future (e.g. delivering services to mobile devices, delivering a far larger number of services online), and the scale of this challenge is such that it will require concerted and cooperative efforts by all departments of the House.

The planning process provides an opportunity to consider whether the facilities that we are providing (e.g. for the tabling of questions, for room bookings, for the delivery of research services etc.) are good enough, or whether they could benefit from fresh thought and new methods of delivery.

Thinking in this area is developing, and work is already underway at a House-wide level – for example, a workshop on 'Anticipating Members future needs' is planned for the end of September involving DG DIS & DG PICT, and outcomes are expected from the recent Information Management workshops led by DG DIS.

**The Board might consider stating clearly that using ICT to deliver better services to Members (rather than simply “ICT”) is a priority for business planning and whether more resources should be targeted at the development of new, ICT-enabled business services.**

#### 19. Area 3: Environment

The survey indicated a lack of understanding among Members and their staff in this area, a desire for more information and a suggestion that environmental concerns are a high priority for them. This validates the fact that the Board have already made this one of its goals.

This suggests that communications should be increased (by the Central Communications team in association with the Head of Fire, Safety & Environment) to raise awareness of the environmental services (e.g. waste disposal) that the House Service provides. A standing item could be included in Commons Quarterly. In addition, those projects with an ‘environmental’ element (especially works projects) should make their environmental impact explicit.

It also suggests that environmental impact should be routinely considered as a factor in investment decisions and should steer priorities in business planning. However, in order to do this the relevant criteria need to be established and understood.

**The Board might consider whether environmental sustainability should be considered more actively in prioritising business planning bids.**

#### 20. Area 4: Customer focus

The survey indicated some dissatisfaction among Members with the courtesy of security staff (an issue familiar from the 2007 survey); there was also some dissatisfaction among Members’ staff with the attitude of staff in the Table Office. These are fairly narrow examples, but the Board may wish to consider customer service in a wider context, and whether something needs to be done to improve our customer service House wide.

Given the proximity to a General Election and the impact of recent events, it is perhaps not the best time to stage a House-wide customer service initiative – partly due to a perceived lack of appetite from staff, and also because it would be more opportune timing to coincide with an intake of new Members after the election. A re-launched or ‘refreshed’ programme in anticipation of a new intake of Members in 2010 may be worthwhile, including the sharing of best practice from the multiple customer service initiatives across the House between departments. Developing such a programme would be challenging given current priorities, levels of resource and the amount of work required in advance of the election.

**The Board might consider how best to improve our customer service, including the possibility of a House-wide customer service initiative or programme that would deliver immediately after the election?**

21. **Are there any other cross-cutting issues from the 2009 survey that the Board thinks should be acted on?**
22. In addition to corporate issues, the survey highlights some specific areas for action at a departmental level (e.g. cleaning; particular items of ICT equipment & remote access; courtesy of security staff, communication with Members' staff). **Does the Board agree that these specific or 'local' actions can be best managed at a departmental level?**

### **Review**

23. In order to ensure that momentum is maintained in taking forward the cross-cutting actions agreed by the Board it is suggested that progress be reported to the Board in the Spring. This timing will ensure that the questioning in the 2010 survey can be framed to assess progress.

### **Messages in response to the survey**

24. **The Board may wish to consider the messages to Members and their staff, and to House staff, in response to the survey. When we publish the survey results in October and present them to the Administration Committee we will need to find some concrete examples of what will change as a result of the survey.**

### **Future surveys**

25. The current planning assumption for the next survey is that it will take place in November 2010, i.e. a suitable amount of time after an election regardless of election date. FDS will conduct the survey again – the second of their contract with the House.
26. The response rate of the survey was undoubtedly adversely affected by recent events, and FDS reported that their telephone reminders to Members' offices were not well received. Assuming the next survey will be in November 2010, at the beginning of a new Parliament and involving a very different group of Members, one would anticipate that there would be a higher response rate as a natural result of these different conditions. However, it will be important to maintain the concerted approach to maximise response rate as with the 2009 survey, and improve where possible. Possible improvements could include:
- Improvements to the survey itself – to make it more streamlined and easier to complete; not necessarily reducing the number of questions.
  - Simple improvements to publicity – for example bespoke envelopes for the survey so that they 'leap out' of Members' post-bags.
  - An extended survey period.

27. The questionnaire design for the next survey must be improved. The revised approach taken by DIS in the 2009 survey in order to ensure that Members could steer the development of new services was effective. Other departments should consider a similar approach in future surveys – to ensure that probing questions are asked with a constructive outcome in mind – i.e. beyond reaffirmation that an excellent service is being provided.
28. Further attention should be given to the existing satisfaction scale (Extremely satisfied / Very satisfied / Fairly satisfied / Not very satisfied / Not at all satisfied). The survey of services project board discussed it at length before the survey launch, but elected not to change it. Upon reflection it would be beneficial to have a less ambiguous scale in 2010 - although this would lose direct comparison of those questions with a satisfaction scale with the 2009 survey.

### **Next steps**

29. A report on the 2009 survey will appear in the next edition of Commons Quarterly (week commencing October 19<sup>th</sup>), and the full report will be published on the internet to coincide with this. Both should be prefaced with a message from the Clerk & Chief Executive.
30. The Administration Committee will consider the survey report and response from the House Service at their October meeting, in addition to a presentation from Charlotte Cornish.
31. It is anticipated that the report will be sent to the Finance & Services Committee after approval by the Administration Committee.
32. The Survey of Services project board will have a final meeting in order to review lessons learned and agree a formal 'closure report'.
- 34. Does the Board agree to these next steps?**