

Research Briefing

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Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff



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Summary

Establishment

On 22 June 2022, the House of Commons agreed to appoint a Speaker's Conference to "consider the employment conditions of Members' staff in order to ensure a more inclusive and respectful working environment".

The [resolution](#) to set up the Speaker's Conference confirmed it would be chaired by the Speaker and that he would appoint up to 14 members, all MPs. The Speaker can appoint one or more members to act as vice-Chair in his absence.

The membership of the Speaker's Conference was announced on 19 October 2022 and is [listed on the Conference webpages](#).

The Speaker's Conference's [first report](#) (PDF) was published on 31 October 2022. It provided an overview of how MPs' staff are currently employed and funded; the support provided to MPs in their role as an employer; some comparisons with the way in which MPs' staff are employed in other legislatures; and reviewed the development of staff support for MPs.

The report set out the principles that would underpin the work of the Speaker's Conference. It set the Speaker's Conference's terms of reference and a call for evidence for the next stage of its work. The [deadline for written submissions was 9 December 2022](#).

Recommendations

The Speaker's Conference's [second report](#) (PDF) was published on 20 July 2023.

It concluded that MPs should continue to be the employers of their staff.

It said that Parliament should champion the work undertaken by MPs' staff. The failure to do this was demoralising and had a debilitating impact on staff. It said the situation would "only be improved in any meaningful sense by creating a culture which recognises and values the work that they do and makes these staff feel part of the wider Parliamentary community".

It proposed an expansion of the Members' Services Team to better support MPs in their human resource functions and to provide guidance for MPs' staff. The Speaker's Conference recommended creating a new restorative practice

service for staff to resolve workplace disputes with their employer. To reflect these changes, the team should be renamed the Members' and Members' Staff Services Team.

The Speaker's Conference also called on IPSA, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, to make changes to its Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses. The Speaker's Conference highlighted concerns that when a member of staff moves jobs from one MP's office to another, there is no continuity of employment.

Debate on the report and implementation of the recommendations

The Speaker's Conference expected its report to be debated and then the House of Commons Commission "to establish an implementation team to deliver as many of the recommendations set out in this report as possible before the next General Election".

MPs debated the report on 16 November 2023 and [endorsed the Speaker's Conference's recommendations](#).

[IPSA's response to the recommendations the Speaker's Conference addressed to it](#) (PDF) was published on 13 November 2023.

At its meeting on 15 January 2024, the House of Commons Commission agreed [the membership of an implementation team](#) (PDF) to oversee and deliver the Conference's recommendations before the end of this Parliament.

Previous Speaker's Conferences

There have been six previous Speaker's Conferences.

The first five conferences were established to attempt to seek cross-party agreement to franchise and electoral reform, including redistribution of seats.

The last conference, in 2008-09, concerned parliamentary representation. Its reports are available on the parliamentary website:

- [Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation](#)

The Library research briefing, [Speaker's Conferences](#), gives the background to the previous Speaker's Conferences.

Review of the employment of MPs' staff (2009)

In April 2009, the House [agreed](#) with a government proposal that MPs' staff should be employed by the House and referred the matter to the House of Commons Commission to make recommendations on implementing the decision.

Although the Commission set out recommendations for implementing the House's proposals, in its report, [Employment of Members' staff by the House](#) (PDF), it did not commend its scheme to the House, instead, it said that "Our preference would be for the House (or if appropriate the IPSA) instead to give greater support to Members as employers".

1 Establishment of the Speaker's Conference on employment conditions of MPs' staff

On 22 June 2022, the House of Commons agreed to appoint a Speaker's Conference to "consider the employment conditions of Members' staff in order to ensure a more inclusive and respectful working environment".¹

The House agreed the Conference would be chaired by the Speaker, who would appoint up to 14 members, all MPs. The Speaker was able to appoint one or more members to act as vice-Chair in his absence.

The Conference was to make recommendations on the contractual arrangements for the employment of MPs' staff.

It was appointed for the remainder of the Parliament but it was required to publish a report describing the principles underpinning its work by 31 October 2022.

It was established as a Committee of the House of Commons, with the powers and legal protections that that entails. An Explanatory Memorandum prepared by the Clerk of the House said "This will ensure that it can secure any evidence it needs, and that evidence can be given to it freely".² In the debate, Pete Wishart, speaking for the SNP, welcomed the fact that the Conference was being established in the form of a select committee.³

1.1 Why did the Speaker propose a Speaker's Conference?

The Speaker set out why he thought a review of the employment arrangements for MPs' staff was necessary in an article in the Guardian, on 30 April 2022. His article was written after Imran Ahmad Khan had announced he would resign from the House after being convicted of sexual assault and at the time allegations had been made that an MP had watched pornography in the Commons Chamber. The Speaker wrote:

¹ [HC Deb 22 June 2022 cc925-930](#)

² House of Commons, [Speaker's Conference Motion – Explanatory Memorandum](#), 21 June 2022

³ [HC Deb 22 June 2022 c929](#)

I believe it is time we reviewed our working practices, and particularly whether it is right that MPs are the employers of their staff. Should someone else – or an outside body – employ the staff, as long as the MP gets to choose them?

This would mean that all new staff would be employed on standard terms and conditions. In addition, if a staff member wanted to report a serious breach of employment practice against an MP, they would not have to go to that same MP to make that report, and less serious complaints and grievances could be resolved more quickly. For MPs, they would not have to add the responsibilities of being a small employer to an already important and demanding job – and would have formal support in managing their staff.

That is why I am working with the parties and House authorities to establish a “[Speaker's conference](#)” as soon as possible to consider these issues. This mechanism was last used in 2008. It requires government and House approval and is like an ad hoc select committee, which will enable us to review current working practices and conditions, take expert advice and consider if there is a case for change.

I would like us to look at best practice in other parliaments around the world, to see if there are other models that would work here.

In my opinion, it is time to consider radical action and review structures and processes that could make a difference. Some serious allegations have been made, which we must address as a matter of urgency. It is imperative we do the right thing by staff, and MPs as well.

At the end of the day, I want to make sure everyone feels supported and has somewhere to turn – and to make this House not only a safe and inclusive workplace, but a model for other legislatures.⁴

1.2 Establishment of the Committee

On 25 July 2022, it was reported that the Speaker had written to MPs and their staff. He explained why the Speaker's Conference had been established and outlined the issues it would consider.

He said it would explore the challenges and benefits that arise from MPs directly employing their own staff. It would consider whether contractual changes and changes to the support provided to MPs and their staff by the House of Commons authorities “could deliver improved support for Members and Members' staff”.⁵

The Speaker expected members to be appointed to the Committee “shortly after the summer recess”. Because the Committee was required to report on its work to the House by 31 October 2022, he asked officials to begin gathering information before MPs were appointed. He also invited MPs and their staff to

⁴ [Sir] Lindsay Hoyle, “[It's time for a rethink on MPs' role in staff issues](#)”, Guardian, 30 April 2022

⁵ House of Commons, [Speaker Update: 2022 Speaker's Conference](#), 25 July 2022 [intranet]

submit views. He expected a formal call for evidence would be issued once members had been appointed to the Committee.⁶

The membership of the Speaker's Conference was announced on 19 October 2022, the day of its first meeting. As provided for in the resolution establishing the Speaker's Conference, the Speaker appointed 14 other MPs to serve on it:

Speaker (Chair)
Sir Graham Brady
Wendy Chamberlain
Tracey Crouch
Wayne David
Clive Efford
Julie Elliott
Florence Eshalomi
Laura Farris
Marion Fellows
Mark Harper (stood down after being appointed to the Cabinet)
Andrew Jones
Paul Maynard
Dame Maria Miller
Wendy Morton (added in January 2023)
Mary Robinson⁷

[Current members](#) are listed on the Speaker's Conference website.

⁶ House of Commons, [Speaker Update: 2022 Speaker's Conference](#), 25 July 2022 [intranet]

⁷ House of Commons news, [Membership of Speaker's Conference announced](#), 19 October 2022 [intranet link]; Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff, [Second Report](#) (PDF), 20 July 2023, HC 1714 2022-23

2

Approach of the Speaker's Conference

On 31 October 2022, the Speaker's Conference's first report was published. It provided an overview of how MPs' staff are currently employed and funded; the support provided to MPs in their role as an employer; some comparisons with the way in which MPs' staff are employed in other legislatures; and reviewed the development of staff support for MPs.⁸

The report set out the principles that would underpin the work of the Speaker's Conference.⁹

The Conference noted that a number of the challenges and issues relating to how staff are employed "which need to be addressed" had been rehearsed before. It said it would "consider these issues anew". It planned to set out a number of options in relation to the contractual arrangements for MPs' staff before the February recess.¹⁰

The Conference set out its terms of reference and a call for evidence for the next stage of its work.¹¹

⁸ Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff, [First Report](#) (PDF), 31 October 2022, HC 692 2022-23, paras 5-28

⁹ As above, paras 33-46

¹⁰ As above, paras 31-32

¹¹ As above, Annex A

3

Recommendations of the Speaker's Conference

On 20 July 2023, the Speaker's Conference's second report was published. It set out the Conference's findings, conclusions and recommendations.¹²

The Conference identified a number of challenges faced by MPs' staff but said they "are not inherently related to the identity of the employer". Consequently, the Conference was "not persuaded" the problems it identified and the issues it explored "would be adequately addressed by a change in the employer".¹³ It said:

The nature of the work of an MP, and the close working arrangements and personal loyalty between Members and their staff mean that Members should continue to be the employers of their staff.¹⁴

The Speaker's Conference said its report set out "a wide ranging and comprehensive package of measures which will support Members in their role as employers and deliver meaningful and lasting change in the working lives of Members' staff".¹⁵

It said that Parliament should champion the work undertaken by MPs' staff. The failure to do this was demoralising and had a debilitating impact on staff. It said the situation would "only be improved in any meaningful sense by creating a culture which recognises and values the work that they do and makes these staff feel part of the wider Parliamentary community".¹⁶

It proposed an expansion of the Members' Services Team. Additional staff would allow the team to manage the increasing demands on existing services and to expand the range of services on offer.¹⁷ It recommended providing additional staff to ensure Members' staff should have access to guidance provided by HR-qualified professionals (four full-time equivalent staff);¹⁸ and creating a new restorative practice service to provide a mechanism for staff to resolve workplace disputes with their employer.¹⁹ To reflect these changes,

¹² Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff, [Second Report](#) (PDF), 20 July 2023, HC 1714 2022-23

¹³ As above, Summary and paras 44-49

¹⁴ As above, para 49

¹⁵ As above, Summary

¹⁶ As above, Summary

¹⁷ As above, paras 93-94

¹⁸ As above, para 125

¹⁹ As above, paras 139-145

the team should be renamed the Members' and Members' Staff Services Team.

The Speaker's Conference also called on IPSA, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, to make changes to its Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses – the funding MPs receive to support their parliamentary duties.²⁰ The Speaker's Conference highlighted concerns that when a member of staff moves jobs from one MP's office to another, there is no continuity of employment.

The Speaker's Conference expected its report to be debated and then the House of Commons Commission “to establish an implementation team to deliver as many of the recommendations set out in this report as possible before the next General Election”.²¹

3.1 Debate on the report

On 16 November 2023, the Speaker's Conference's second report was debated by MPs.²² The motion, in the name of Sir Charles Walker (who speaks for the House of Commons Commission) and Penny Mordaunt (Leader of the House of Commons), stated:

That this House welcomes the Second Report of the Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff (HC 1714 of Session 2022–23), endorses its recommendations, recognises Members' responsibilities as employers and the need to improve the working lives of Members' staff and accordingly calls on the House of Commons Commission, IPSA and the political parties to address and implement the recommendations from the Speaker's Conference.

In opening the debate, Penny Mordaunt said the report made “a series of recommendations designed to improve the working lives of Members' staff and provide better support to Members as employers”.²³ She said the employment arrangements for MPs' staff were not a matter for the Government but she welcomed the conclusion that MPs should “continue to employ their own staff directly”.²⁴

She mentioned recommendations on training for MPs, “It will help them in their work here and enable them to continue their career when they leave this place”; and on further help and support for MPs and their staff in employment matters.²⁵

²⁰ Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff, [Second Report](#) (PDF), 20 July 2023, Summary

²¹ As above, para 51

²² [HC Deb 16 November 2023 cc808-807](#)

²³ HC Deb 16 November 2023 c808

²⁴ HC Deb 16 November 2023 c808

²⁵ HC Deb 16 November 2023 c809

She discussed recommendations directed at IPSA and noted the formal response from IPSA that had been published by the Speaker's Conference on 13 November 2023.²⁶ (See also section 3.2.)

For the Labour Party, Nick Smith said the Party supported the Speaker's Conference recommendations.²⁷

Deidre Brock (SNP) said the SNP welcomed "any proposals that aim to ensure best employment practice". She paid tribute to the "enormous" but often "unseen" contribution of MPs' staff. She highlighted the conclusion that constituency staff often felt "neglected and detached" from Westminster.²⁸

Like other speakers, she supported the expansion of the Members' Services Team (MST), which over a very short time had "come to provide an invaluable and highly professional service".²⁹

Both Deidre Brock and Nick Smith highlighted the recommendation that IPSA should look at continuity of service for MPs' staff if they moved from one MP's office to another.³⁰

Andrew Jones (Conservative), a member of the Speaker's Conference, reflected on the process and focus of the work of the Conference. In discussing the report, he too talked about the need for employment rights around continuity of service and better support for staff working in constituencies.³¹

Clive Efford (Labour) was also a member of the Conference. He reflected on the conclusion that MPs should continue to employ their own staff. He highlighted the dual role of regulation and service provider that IPSA had to perform.³² The Conference had recommended:

We encourage IPSA to think differently about its roles as a regulator and a provider of support services, so that staff working in a customer service role have a culture focused on supporting Members in delivering their constituency and Parliamentary functions, rather than acting as a barrier to efficient delivery of services. This could be achieved via an internal re-organisation of how IPSA manages its business and no changes to legislation would be required.³³

In its response, IPSA said:

²⁶ Speaker's Conference, [Written evidence submitted by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority \(IPSA\) \(SPC0042\)](#) (PDF), 13 November 2023

²⁷ HC Deb 16 November 2023 c810

²⁸ HC Deb 16 November 2023 c811

²⁹ HC Deb 16 November 2023 c811

³⁰ HC Deb 16 November 2023 c810, c812

³¹ HC Deb 16 November 2023 c813

³² HC Deb 16 November 2023 c816

³³ Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff, [Second Report](#) (PDF), 20 July 2023, HC 1714 2022-23, para 177

Over the past 12 months, we have conducted a root and branch review of IPSA's regulatory approach and service provision and IPSA's Board has approved a plan to further improve what we do and how we fulfil our statutory duties. This Programme, referenced here in our response to the Conference's recommendations, is about regulation through service. We are committed to finding the right balance between supporting parliamentary democracy, assuring the public, delivering value for money to the taxpayer and operating efficiently, as required by our statutory duties. We are intent on making the right decisions to enable MPs to fulfil their parliamentary duties while maintaining public trust and being as efficient, effective, and transparent as we can be.³⁴

In closing the debate, Penny Mordaunt answered a number of points raised in the debate. Questions about the continuity of staff employment were for IPSA. She said the Conference had considered how to ensure training was taken up. She echoed Andrew Jones' comments on the importance of "standards and the duty of care that we all have to one another".³⁵

3.2 IPSA's response

As noted above, a number of the recommendations from the Speaker's Conference were directed to IPSA.

The formal response from IPSA to the Speaker's Conference was published on 13 November 2023.³⁶

IPSA's response began with a letter from its Chair, Richard Lloyd. He wrote:

At the heart of our response is a commitment to continue and strengthen our collaboration with the House. We therefore were particularly pleased to see the Conference's recommendations regarding the strengthening of the Members' Services Team and the expansion of its services. We now work very closely with that team as we all navigate the tricky employment landscape that Members Staff are in, and I know from feedback from staff representatives that this collaboration has produced real benefit in more coherent support for MP offices and better understanding of the challenges they face.³⁷

³⁴ Speaker's Conference, [Written evidence submitted by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority \(IPSA\) \(SPC0042\)](#) (PDF), 13 November 2023

³⁵ HC Deb 16 November 2023 cc816-817

³⁶ Speaker's Conference, [Written evidence submitted by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority \(IPSA\) \(SPC0042\)](#) (PDF), 13 November 2023

³⁷ As above

3.3

Implementation of the recommendations

At its meeting on 15 January 2024, the House of Commons Commission agreed the membership of an implementation team to oversee and deliver the Conference's recommendations before the end of this Parliament.³⁸

In a debate on the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) on 30 November 2023, MPs welcomed the proposed expansion of the Members' Services Team, particularly the HR aspects. They hoped it would relieve the ICGS of some of the work that had had an impact on the speed with which the ICGS could deal with cases.³⁹

³⁸ House of Commons Commission, [Decisions](#) (PDF), 15 January 2024, Item 4

³⁹ [HC Deb 30 November 2023 c376WH](#)

4 Members' staff

On 19 July 2023, the number of people employed by Members of Parliament through IPSA was 3,746.⁴⁰

Staff funded by IPSA are employed by individual MPs. IPSA's Scheme for MPs' Staffing and Business Costs stipulates:

The salaries of staff employed by MPs after 7 May 2010 will only be paid by IPSA if the following conditions are satisfied:

- a. the member of staff is employed to do work that complies with one or more of the job descriptions published by IPSA;
- b. the member of staff's salary is within the relevant range published by IPSA for the job description in question;
- c. a contract of employment that complies with the model contract of employment published by IPSA from time to time has been signed by the relevant parties.⁴¹

IPSA issues staff job descriptions and pay bands each year. There are up to three pay ranges for three job families, different pay ranges apply to staff in London and staff outside London. The three job families are:

- Administrative, includes administrative assistants and office managers
- Executive, includes caseworkers and constituency support managers
- Research, includes parliamentary assistants and policy assistants.⁴²

A full list of [MPs' staff job descriptions and pay bands](#) is provided on the IPSA website.

On 3 October 2023, the UCL Constitution Unit published a report entitled [MPs' Staff, the Unsung Heroes: An Examination of Who They Are and What They Do](#). The report by Dr Rebecca McKee combined "original analysis of existing available data with entirely new evidence from an original survey of MPs' staff, alongside an exploration of the history of MPs' staffing support and alternative models of staffing arrangements in other legislatures".⁴³

⁴⁰ [PQ194437](#), 20 July 2023

⁴¹ Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, *The Scheme of MPs' Staffing and Business Costs 2023-24 (revised July 2023) (PDF)*, 19 July 2023, HC 1633 2022-23, para 7.6

⁴² IPSA, [MPs' staff job descriptions and pay bands](#)

⁴³ Rebecca McKee, [MPs' Staff, the Unsung Heroes: An Examination of Who They Are and What They Do](#), UCL Constitution Unit, 3 October 2023

In an accompanying blog post Rebecca McKee summarised some of the report's findings:

- [MPs' staff, the unsung heroes: an examination of who they are and what they do](#), UCL Constitution Unit Blog, 3 October 2023

5

Previous Speaker's Conferences

There have been six previous Speaker's Conferences. The Library briefing, [Speaker's Conferences](#), gives the background to the previous Speaker's Conferences.

The first five conferences were established to attempt to seek cross-party agreement to franchise and electoral reform, including redistribution of seats. The creation of the Electoral Commission, in 2000, meant that there is now an impartial permanent mechanism for providing independent advice to the Government on electoral reform.

The last conference, in 2008-09, had the following terms of reference:

To consider and make recommendations for rectifying the disparity between the representation of women and ethnic minorities in the House of Commons and their representation in the UK population at large; and to consider such other matters as might, by agreement, be referred to for consideration.

Unlike previous conferences it was established as a committee of the House, chaired by the Speaker but with a vice-chair to act on the Speaker's behalf. The debate to set up the Conference/committee was held on [12 November 2008](#).⁴⁴

The reports of the Conference are available on the Parliamentary website:

- [Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation](#)

⁴⁴ [HC Deb 12 November 2008 cc896-912](#)

6 Review of the employment of MPs' staff (2009)

6.1 Government proposals

In April 2009, the Government proposed that Members' staff should be centrally employed, among a number of changes to the system of MP's allowances. Its proposals were set out in a written statement:

D. MPs' Staff. In future all staff appointed by MPs without exception should become direct employees of the House of Commons, which would become centrally responsible for their employment terms and conditions, their contracts, and the payment of their salaries within the limit allowed - and will have the right to make an independent assessment of such contracts. The Committee on Standards in Public Life is examining the rules governing employment of spouses or other relatives.⁴⁵

6.2 House decision: April 2009

The House debated and agreed to the Government's proposals on 30 April 2009.⁴⁶ The Government motion stated:

(1) That, in the opinion of this House, staff who work for an hon. Member should be employed by the House, as a personal appointment and managed by the hon. Member; and

(2) That the House of Commons Commission shall consider this decision and make recommendations for its implementation, including any transitional provisions which may be necessary, by 29 October 2009.

During the debate, Harriet Harman, then Leader of the House, gave an assurance that there would be consultation with staff and she added that Chris Bryant, the Deputy Leader of the House, had already begun meeting with trade unions and staff associations.⁴⁷

In the course of the debate, Sir Stuart Bell, a member of the House of Commons Commission, noted that the Members Estimate Committee's review of allowances, which was published in June 2008, had considered the

⁴⁵ [HC Deb 21 April 2009 cc10WS-11WS](#)

⁴⁶ [HC Deb 30 April 2009 cc1063-1142](#)

⁴⁷ HC Deb 30 April 2009 c1071

question of the House employing Members' staff.⁴⁸ It made no recommendations on the House employing Members' staff.⁴⁹

6.3

House of Commons Commission report on employing Members' staff

The House of Commons Commission (the statutory body responsible for the administration and services of the House of Commons) reported on the Employment of Members' staff by the House in October 2009, in accordance with the resolution of the House of 30 April 2009.

Whilst the Commission was considering this issue, the Committee on Standards in Public Life was examining Members' allowances and the legislation establishing the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) was passed.

Although the Commission set out recommendations for implementing the House's proposals, it did not commend its scheme to the House for the following reasons:

- it would have heavy costs
- it would secure no clear benefits
- it would place Members' staff in an ambiguous employment relationship and
- it would significantly reduce the flexibility Members currently have to manage their staff.⁵⁰

Instead, it said that "Our preference would be for the House (or if appropriate the IPSA) instead to give greater support to Members as employers".⁵¹

At its meeting on 19 October 2009, the Commission agreed that on publication a copy of its report should be sent to the Committee on Standards in Public Life.⁵²

⁴⁸ HC Deb 30 April 2009 c1078

⁴⁹ Members Estimate Committee, [Review of Allowances](#), 25 June 2008, HC 578-I 2007-08, chapter 3

⁵⁰ House of Commons Commission, [Employment of Members' staff by the House](#) (PDF), 27 October 2009, HC 1059 2008-09, para 105

⁵¹ as above, para 106

⁵² House of Commons Commission, [Decisions 19 October 2009](#), Item 4

6.4

Committee on Standards in Public Life comments on the employment of Members' staff

The Committee on Standards in Public Life's (CSPL) review, *MPs' expenses and allowances* was published in November 2009. The CSPL noted that the contents of its report were finalised before it had received a copy of the House of Commons Commission's report.⁵³ However, the CSPL had reviewed the issue.

It argued that Members should follow high standards of employment practice and that there should be "broad parity of treatment for MPs' staff across the House of Commons". It said that central employment of staff was not necessary to achieve such standards. It then recommended that "MPs should continue to be able to select and directly appoint their own staff":

Subject to the outcome of the House of Commons Commission Report on central employment, MPs should continue to be able to select and directly appoint their own staff. Appointments should be made on the basis of merit and open recruitment. The House of Commons authorities should issue binding guidance, accompanied by a code of practice, setting out the processes to be followed by MPs when recruiting staff (including those working in constituencies) and on other matters of good employment practice, including disciplinary and grievance procedures. MPs should receive appropriate training and HR support.⁵⁴

6.5

Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority and the employment of Members' staff

The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) was established by the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, which received Royal Assent in July 2009. It was required to devise and run a scheme for Members' allowances, to be in place following the General Election, which took place in May 2010. The conclusions of the CSPL review were referred to IPSA.

IPSA issued a consultation in January 2010, seeking views on the content and administration of a new MPs' expenses scheme. It mentioned the issue "Who

⁵³ The Committee on Standards in Public Life, [MPs' expenses and allowances: Supporting Parliament, safeguarding the taxpayer](#) (PDF), Twelfth Report, Cm 7724, November 2009, p62, n17

⁵⁴ The Committee on Standards in Public Life, [MPs' expenses and allowances: Supporting Parliament, safeguarding the taxpayer](#) (PDF), Twelfth Report, Cm 7724, November 2009, paras 6.46-6.47 and Recommendation 18

is the employer of Members' staff?" in its consultation document but did not ask specific questions on the issue:

The question of who is the appropriate employer of MPs' staff is one that has attracted attention recently, not least in the House of Commons Commission's report entitled "Employment of Members' staff by the House". The conclusion reached was that existing arrangements, with the MP as the employer, should be retained, but improved. This departs from an earlier vote of the House of Commons. We do not yet know whether the House will change its position. We note, however, that the CSPL supported the Commission's suggestion, and that the three main political parties have indicated their intention to implement the CSPL's recommendations.⁵⁵

The Scheme that IPSA brought forward after the General Election confirmed that "Nothing in this Scheme shall be taken to affect the MP's position as the employer of their staff".⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Independent Parliament Standards Authority, [MPs' Expenses: A Consultation](#) (PDF), January 2010, para 8.6

⁵⁶ Independent Parliament Standards Authority, [The MPs' Expenses Scheme](#) (PDF), March 2010, HC 501 2009-10, para 8.7

7

Gemma White's comments on the employment of MPs' staff

In 2019, as part of the process of responding to bullying and harassment in Parliament, Gemma White was commissioned to consider the treatment of staff employed by MPs.

She commented on some overarching aspects of the employment of MPs' staff. She noted that there was "no set of uniform employment procedures for MPs and their staff". She also found there was no collective oversight of MPs' employment practices.⁵⁷

She commented:

Time and time again contributors referred to MPs' offices as being "650 individual businesses" as a reason for the lack of any coherent approach to employment practices. To the extent that they are 650 individual businesses, they are unlike any other: they are funded by the taxpayer to work in the public interest, supporting MPs with their Parliamentary functions. As such they must be exemplars of good employment practice, not lagging behind.⁵⁸

Some contributors to her inquiry suggested that MPs should cease to employ their staff and that they should be employed by a separate body. Both the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, which funds MPs' staffing, and the House of Commons Commission, which employs the staff of the House, were suggested.⁵⁹

She did not consider such a change was necessary. She explained:

I do not consider that to be necessary or appropriate at this stage. Many Members of Parliament are good employers and in any event a change of employer would not itself resolve the issues which arise from the day to day working relationship between Members and their staff. Regardless of the identity of the employer, what is required is a properly resourced, proactive, department with responsibility for overseeing employment practice in MPs' offices.⁶⁰

As a result of Gemma White's recommendations, the House has set up the Members' Services Team (MST). The team has been in place since March 2020 and incorporates several main elements:

⁵⁷ Gemma White QC, [Bullying and Harassment of MPs' Parliamentary Staff - Independent Inquiry Report](#) (PDF), 19 July 2019, HC 2206, 2017-19, para 9

⁵⁸ as above, para 13

⁵⁹ as above, para 14

⁶⁰ as above, para 14

- an HR service for Members and their proxies which is delivered by the Members' HR Advice Service. MST has also published a range of best practice employment guides for MPs, which are supported by regular employment workshops;
- engagement and pastoral support to all MPs' staff - including signposting to key services – which is delivered by the MST Engagement Team;
- research into Member and Members' Staff engagement and interaction with House services.⁶¹

⁶¹ House of Commons, [Members' Services Team](#) [ParliNet link]

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