

House of Commons
Catering Committee

**REFRESHMENT
FACILITIES IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS**

First Report of Session 2001–02

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*Report, together with
Proceedings of the Committee,
Minutes of Evidence and Appendices*

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The Catering Committee

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Footnotes

In the footnotes of this Report, references to oral evidence are indicated by 'Q' followed by the question number. References to written evidence are indicated by the page number, eg. 'Ev 12'.

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FIRST REPORT

The Catering Committee has agreed to the following Report:

REFRESHMENT FACILITIES IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

I. Introduction

Why hold this inquiry?

1. In recent times there has been severe pressure on certain refreshment facilities in the House of Commons. This is not a new phenomenon; but the pressure seems to be increasing despite extra capacity provided by new facilities. We were well placed to conduct an investigation into the causes of this pressure and possible solutions. We hope that our findings, although they are addressed to the House Administration and in particular to the Refreshment Department, will be of interest to all those who eat in the House.

2. The House's refreshment facilities cater for a great range of customers, from Members, Members' staff and permanent staff of the House to Members and staff from the House of Lords, members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, temporary staff (including contractors), international parliamentary bodies with branches at Westminster, and occasional users such as civil servants. We have sought to gather views from all quarters. The Chairman wrote to all Members in February 2002; an e-mail was sent to all Parliamentary Video and Data Network (PDVN) users; and we wrote to a variety of bodies representing those who work in the House, inviting comment. A wealth of written evidence was submitted in response. We also held two oral evidence sessions. We are most grateful to all those who contributed.

3. In order to provide statistical information for the inquiry, the Refreshment Department conducted a survey of usage of the refreshment facilities, based on a series of snapshots. For each of the periods selected,¹ information was collected on the category of pass held by each customer, the time at which each customer paid for purchases, the number of guests and whether purchases were to "take away" or to "eat in". A breakdown of the information gathered is shown in Appendix 1.²

Background

4. The Refreshment Department is now consolidating after a period of considerable change, beginning with the total overhaul of the kitchens in the main building of the Palace of Westminster and leading up to the opening of new facilities in Portcullis House in December 2000. In our view, the Department provides an excellent service overall, and we agree with a witness of many years' service to the House that the food has "improved greatly over the last ten years".³

5. The new facilities in Portcullis House consist of a cafeteria (the "Debate") seating 182 people,⁴ a contemporary-style service restaurant (the "Adjournment") seating 64 people, and a coffee bar (the "Despatch Box"). All three have proved to be very popular. The number of covers served in the House on sitting days rose from 6,000 in 2000–01 to approximately 7,000 in 2001–02,⁵ and it seems likely that the new Portcullis House facilities may be largely responsible. If so, it is striking that the opening of new facilities has increased custom in real terms rather than simply diverting it from other outlets.

¹ A Wednesday lunchtime and evening, a Thursday evening, a Friday (sitting day) lunch time and a recess day lunchtime.

² Ev 35.

³ Q 141.

⁴ 95 of these seats are in the covered courtyard outside the cafeteria.

⁵ Information supplied by the Director of Catering Services.

6. It is only very recently—since May 2002—that Parliament has provided refreshment facilities specifically for visitors, including groups from constituencies and unaccompanied visitors. The new Jubilee Café, which is situated off Westminster Hall, provides seating for 100 people and serves cold snacks, pasties and hot and cold drinks throughout the day. It is too early to measure the impact of the Café on usage of other facilities.

7. This increase in overall capacity in the House has not, however, put an end either to queueing or to difficulties in finding seating at peak times in venues where demand is concentrated. It should be said at this early stage that pressure is by far the greatest in the cafeterias, which are therefore the focus of this Report. We begin by looking at trends underlying the usage of the House's refreshment facilities.

Trends

8. There are now more people working in the Palace of Westminster than ever before. On 1 February 2002, there were 13,406 passholders, 5,605 (42 per cent) of whom held temporary passes.⁶ Members of the two Houses and their spouses accounted for approximately 2,460 passes;⁷ Members' and Peers' staff held nearly 1,750 passes, contractors approximately 2,400 passes, the press around 450 passes, and Civil Service and other Government staff just over 2,500 passes.⁸ Many of these passholders would have cause to be in the Palace of Westminster only very occasionally (e.g. civil servants). These figures do not, of course, include guests.

9. It is difficult to forecast whether the number of Palace of Westminster passholders is likely to change significantly, assuming that no change is made to the types of people entitled to hold a pass. The number of Members of the House of Lords may decrease, depending on reform of the composition of the upper House; but it may be that Members of a reformed House would be more active and would be present on the Estate for more of the week.⁹ Furthermore, excluded Members of the Lords¹⁰ might be entitled to continue to hold passes and use facilities in the Palace. It seems perfectly possible that Members of both Houses might want to employ more staff in the future.¹¹ Both Houses resolved last year to make more financial provision for the employment of staff by their Members.¹² Total expenditure on Peers' expenses in the financial year 2001-02 was £10,014,470, an increase of 19 per cent on expenditure in 2000-01.¹³

10. The Refreshment Department may also need to adapt to deal with the consequences of any reform of the structure of the working week in the Commons. The Leader of the House has submitted to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House suggestions for earlier sittings on a Wednesday and a reduction in the number of Friday sittings,¹⁴ and we expect that proposals may be put to the House before long. The possible changes outlined by the Leader of the House would suggest an ever greater concentration of activity during the day in the middle of the week, with more people using refreshment facilities at lunch times but fewer Members present on the Parliamentary Estate on Wednesday and Thursday evenings and on Fridays.¹⁵ The Serjeant at Arms suggested that "we might be

⁶ Temporary passholders have restricted access to refreshment facilities and cannot escort visitors within the Palace.

⁷ Includes 116 former Members of Parliament and 184 excluded Hereditary Peers.

⁸ Mostly temporary passes: also includes 163 Lord Chancellor's Department staff. See Ev 52.

⁹ Q 95.

¹⁰ The term "Members of the Lords" is now used in preference to the term "Peers".

¹¹ See Q 95. On 5 July 2001, the House of Lords agreed to increase from £37.00 to £50.00 the maximum amount which may be claimed daily by Members of the Lords for secretarial expenses.

¹² *Official Report* 5 July 2001 col. 466 (Commons) and 5 July 2001 col. 885 (Lords). The levels of allowances for Commons Members are now based on an assumption that Members will employ three, rather than two and a half, full-time staff.

¹³ *Official Report* [Lords], 20 June 2002, col. 191(WA). This figure covers a wide range of expenses, not just staff costs.

¹⁴ *Modernisation of the House of Commons: A Reform Programme for Consultation* (HC 440, Session 2001-02).

¹⁵ See Q 13.

in for a period of great peaks and troughs during the sitting week”,¹⁶ and others echoed his comments.¹⁷

11. Levels of activity during Parliamentary recesses appear to be rising, blurring the distinction between “term-time” and recess.¹⁸ Witnesses representing the Parliamentary Press Gallery told us that their work was “less and less related to what goes on in the Chamber and whether we are in recess or not”,¹⁹ and we heard that Members’ staff now work longer hours during recesses than formerly.²⁰ We were struck by the numbers recorded by the Refreshment Department as using the cafeterias on the recess day selected for the survey.²¹

12. Space is at a premium throughout the Estate. The Serjeant at Arms has commissioned a review of accommodation and the use of space in the House of Commons.²² The final report from this review is expected in November 2002 and, although the review does not cover Refreshment Department premises, our recommendations will need to be seen in the light of the review’s findings.

What determines where people choose to eat?

13. The Refreshment Department survey did not ask customers why they used a particular cafeteria in preference to another; but we have been able to build up a picture from comments submitted in evidence. Quality of food and convenience are the main determinants, although it is not clear which is the more important. The Terrace Cafeteria is apparently favoured for convenience: it serves acceptable food, most of it traditional in style, but few people said that the food was an attraction in its own right. Nonetheless, it fills fast at weekday lunch times, being the only cafeteria in the main building open to Members’ staff and the majority of House staff. For those who want to take a short lunch-break, the alternatives are seen as being either too far away (7 Millbank) or too busy for a quick meal (Debate Cafeteria).

14. The Press Cafeteria is another example of an outlet used for convenience rather than for the quality of food.²³ We were also told that security staff, who are distributed throughout the Estate, preferred to eat in the area where they were stationed.²⁴

15. On the other hand, the Debate cafeteria attracts custom because of the quality of the food served, perceptions that it is freshly prepared and assembled to order, and because of the ambience of the covered courtyard in Portcullis House.²⁵ In trading terms, the Debate has been an enormous success and appears to be especially popular with Members’ staff.²⁶ We heard that staff working in the Westminster offices of the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) favour the Debate because of the “innovative” menus and the attractive surroundings.²⁷ The IPU also told us that “good quality food, accompanied by good service, will always win out over location”, and it called for standards to be raised to a common level across the Estate. The Debate is the most convenient cafeteria for all those who work in Portcullis House and in the two Norman Shaw buildings. Once Norman Shaw South is re-occupied, the total number of Members and Members’ staff working in these

¹⁶ Q 80.

¹⁷ See, for example, Q 153.

¹⁸ Q 74.

¹⁹ Q 125.

²⁰ Q 43.

²¹ Ev 40–41.

²² Q 71.

²³ QQ 23 and 116.

²⁴ Q 76.

²⁵ See Q 116.

²⁶ Ev 36.

²⁷ Ev 19.

three buildings will be at least 850.²⁸ Some 170 House staff are also based in these buildings or in 1 Canon Row.²⁹ The catchment area is therefore large.

16. It was also suggested to us that the range of facilities now on offer provided an incentive to staff to eat in the House rather than use commercial take-away outlets.³⁰ The steady shift of Members and their staff away from the southern end of the Parliamentary Estate may accentuate this trend. Whereas it might be fairly easy for someone working in 7 Millbank to walk to a sandwich shop in Great Smith Street or Victoria Street, the distances for those working in the main building or north of Bridge Street are that little bit greater.

II. Existing facilities and possibilities for change

17. We now consider the various cafeterias in turn.

Terrace Cafeteria

Outline of the Cafeteria

18. Created in 1996 as part of the redevelopment of the kitchens, bars and cafeterias serving the main building, the Terrace Cafeteria replaced separate Members' and Strangers' Cafeterias with a single servery and a medium-sized dining area, approximately 40 per cent of which is reserved for Members (and Peers who are former Members), together with up to three guests. Access to the other half of the seating area is open to all photopass holders with up to two guests, temporary passholders (except between 12.00 noon and 2.00 pm), and a number of other groups with special dispensation.³¹ Between the two halves is a screen. It was anticipated by one of our predecessor Committees that the screen would be moveable from time to time "to give flexibility to vary the seating allocation to reflect the space requirements of users".³² In practice, the screen has never been moved.

19. For Members' staff and the large majority of House staff, the Terrace Cafeteria is the only place in the main building where they can eat. Some are obliged to eat there because of their duties in connection with the business of the House: a small number of non-Officer staff from the Clerk's Department (not normally more than two at any one time) man division desks and must therefore be able to reach the lobbies within a minute or so.³³

20. The single greatest source of discontent in the evidence submitted to our inquiry concerned overcrowding and queues in the Terrace Cafeteria,³⁴ which comes under particular pressure between approximately 12.30 pm and 2.00 pm. We are not aware of significant overcrowding in the evenings, and the results of the Refreshment Department survey appear to confirm this impression.³⁵

²⁸ Approximately 200 in Norman Shaw North, 150 in Norman Shaw South, and 500 in Portcullis House: See Q 60.

²⁹ In addition, 308 security staff are currently based in 1 Canon Row; only a proportion of these staff are on duty at any one time, and some normally work in the main building.

³⁰ Q 41.

³¹ See Ev 46 for precise access provisions.

³² *Refreshment Services for the House of Commons*, First Report from the Catering Committee, HC 75 (Session 1993-94).

³³ Q 8, also Ev 12.

³⁴ See Annex

³⁵ Ev 40.

The servery and tills

21. It was noted in evidence that queues in the Terrace Cafeteria often appeared not to be connected to seating capacity.³⁶ It was said that:

- the queue at the servery counter would be reduced if the number of staff serving were to be increased;
- the layout was unsuitable, particularly at the hot and cold drinks area, where customers were obliged to backtrack;³⁷
- there were not always enough tills open at busy periods;³⁸ and
- the presentation and serving of food could be improved.³⁹

22. The floor space available for display of food, service and tills is small considering the volume of traffic that passes through the Terrace Cafeteria. We accept that design options are limited, but we nonetheless believe that more could be done to improve throughput. **We recommend that the Director of Catering Services, taking account of the detailed issues raised in evidence, should investigate ways of improving the flow of customers through the Terrace Cafeteria serving area.**

23. A few relatively small-scale changes may help to improve the flow through the servery, and some steps in this direction have been taken during the course of this inquiry. They do not, however, address the problem of restricted space in the dining area. More far-reaching measures are needed to increase capacity for House staff and Members' staff in the main building.

The screen

24. A large number of submissions from House staff urged us either to move the screen in the Cafeteria so as to increase the available seating area for non-Members, or to remove it altogether.⁴⁰ We were told that staff felt frustrated when the non-Member section was full to capacity but seats were free in the Members-only section.⁴¹

25. We recognise that such removal of the screen, opening up all of the seating area to House staff and Members' staff in addition to Members, would be strongly welcomed in many quarters. We agree that in many ways removal of the screen would be desirable in principle. It is essential, however, that suitable provision should first be made for Members elsewhere in the main building.⁴² We believe that it would only be practical to consider moving or removing the screen once such alternative provision has become popular with Members. We now look at some options.

Alternative provision for Members: Dining Rooms and the Churchill Room

26. It is our impression that formal dining at lunch times is becoming less common amongst Members, and that Members in general are looking for "quicker" and less formal meals at lunch times. The room used as the Members' Dining Room at lunch times (the smaller of the two Dining Rooms) currently serves between six and twelve covers on sitting days. The Churchill Room is also under-used, sometimes serving as few as four covers at lunch times on sitting days. Although we recognise that there is a small group of Members who regularly use the smaller Dining Room in the middle of the day, it is difficult to justify the use of this space by so few.

³⁶ See Annex.

³⁷ See Ev 30.

³⁸ QQ 36 and 146; Ev 54.

³⁹ QQ 41 and 142-3.

⁴⁰ Ev 1, 30, 54, 55.

⁴¹ Q 42. See also Ev 18 (CPA).

⁴² See Ev 7.

27. **We therefore believe that steps should be taken to attract more Members into the smaller Dining Room and the Churchill Room at lunch times. Some exclusive waiter-service provision for Members should be retained at lunch times, either at one end of the smaller Dining Room or in the Chess Room, which is currently under-used. Either a part of, or the whole of, the smaller Dining Room could then offer a competitively-priced buffet and other “quick” dishes to Members and their guests. We invite the Accommodation and Works Committee to consider our proposal for converting the Chess Room.**

28. The quality of food served in the Churchill Room is in our opinion high; but the general atmosphere is rather staid, and we suspect that this limits its appeal. Ideally, the Churchill Room would provide a cafeteria service at lunch time while remaining as a waiter-service facility in the evenings. It is, however, impractical to operate a dual-purpose outlet of this kind. It would be difficult, for instance, to disguise serveries and tills in the evenings, and the ambience would suffer. The existing kitchen is in any case too small: major investment would be required to provide the necessary preparation and cooking facilities. **We propose therefore that the Churchill Room should at present remain as a waiter-service restaurant but that the Director of Catering Services should present options for different menu styles.**

Terrace Pavilion

29. In the long term, a more radical course of action might be required. The Terrace Pavilion, which provides buffet facilities principally for Members and Officers of the House and their guests, is housed under a marquee on the Terrace overlooking the river. The marquee is some 15 years old and is now showing signs of wear and tear. A decision will soon be required on its future.

30. The Terrace Pavilion was only ever intended as a temporary structure. It has served the House well, but it is difficult to heat in cold weather and difficult to keep cool in summer. Furthermore, it is not at all welcoming in bad weather. **Some form of replacement for the marquee on the Terrace which blends better with the stonework, or a glazed structure, would be more attractive when viewed from the river and less at the mercy of bad weather. A riverside restaurant or brasserie could then be provided for Members and their guests, freeing up space in the main building for staff use. We invite other Domestic Committees to submit their views on these proposals. We recommend that the Director of Catering Services and the Director of Estates should draw up proposals for an alternative structure on the Terrace, and that these proposals should be submitted for discussion with all bodies concerned.**

Strangers' Bar

31. The layout of the new Strangers' Bar is seen by many Members as being not as congenial as that of the old Bar, and it is difficult to prevent overcrowding at the bar itself. If it proved possible to implement plans for a riverside restaurant, as described above, the Strangers' Bar could be relocated in what is now the Churchill Room, which we believe would be much better suited for the purpose.

Opening up access to press facilities

32. Alternative provision should also be made for House staff and Members' staff who want to eat in the main building. It was suggested to us that more use could be made of the refreshment facilities provided principally for the Parliamentary Press Gallery.⁴³ These consist of a Press Dining Room (for formal dining), a Press Cafeteria and a Press Bar. Access is restricted to Members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery and to staff of the Official Report (Hansard).⁴⁴

⁴³ Ev 30.

⁴⁴ Press Gallery Doorkeepers have access to the Press Bar and the Press Cafeteria. See Ev 46 and 50.

33. Witnesses representing the Parliamentary Press Gallery told us that they had no objection to opening up access to their facilities. On the contrary, this was seen as potentially beneficial, as an increase in covers served would help to justify the existence of the Dining Room and would generate a faster turnover of food in the Cafeteria.⁴⁵ We can see no reason why the existing access regime need be retained, and **we recommend that all restrictions on access to the Press Cafeteria, the Press Dining Room and the Press Bar should be lifted. We further recommend that the Director of Catering Services should monitor usage of the Dining Room to ensure that an adequate level of access is preserved for members of the Press Gallery.**

34. Witnesses were very critical of the quality of the food served in the Press Cafeteria, pointing out that very few of the potential users saw it as their first choice of eating place.⁴⁶ It was said that the cooked food (particularly pasta dishes and vegetables) lost its freshness and that the “rather eccentric” menu put people off.⁴⁷ We visited the Cafeteria and found the surroundings somewhat dated and uninspiring. We note that the Cafeteria is due for a refit as part of the 2003-04 works programme and that furnishings and fittings are to be replaced. **We welcome the plans to modernise the Press Cafeteria, thereby improving the quality of the food.**

The Debate Cafeteria

Outline of the Debate

35. We have already noted the popularity of the Debate, where the food on offer is a definite attraction. It is to some extent a victim of its own success, with long queues often forming at lunch times, even during recesses. For some, this detracts from its appeal. We heard that it was “always busy” and that it “seemed to be getting busier”; another commented that eating there was “not a relaxing experience, as you feel that you have to move on to let others eat”.⁴⁸ We were told that seating was sometimes so scarce that people took trays to their offices and ate there.⁴⁹ Others avoided it simply because they were reluctant to spare time queueing.

36. There is little scope for providing more seating either inside or directly outside the “Debate”. Any increase in the number of tables and chairs in the covered courtyard would, we believe, make the surroundings appear unduly cluttered. In any case, the kitchens and food preparation areas serving the Debate are already operating at full capacity at peak times. **We therefore believe that the Refreshment Department should concentrate on developing new facilities north of Bridge Street to attract people away from the Debate.** The re-occupation of the Norman Shaw South building will make this imperative.⁵⁰ We make a number of proposals, which are set out below.

A sandwich bar in Portcullis House

37. We note from the evidence the popularity of the made-to-order sandwich service offered at the Portcullis Cafeteria in 7 Millbank.⁵¹ We also note that this is the one Commons outlet where more customers buy food to take away than buy to “eat in”.⁵² **We therefore recommend that the Refreshment Department provide a made-to-order sandwich bar (perhaps with delicatessen, if space allows) somewhere at the northern end of the Parliamentary Estate. Our preferred site for such a facility would be a unit**

⁴⁵ QQ 121 and 127.

⁴⁶ Q 116.

⁴⁷ QQ 128–130.

⁴⁸ See Annex.

⁴⁹ Q 41.

⁵⁰ Q 6. See also Ev 6, 12 and 30.

⁵¹ Annex; also Q 85.

⁵² Ev 42.

on the ground floor of Portcullis House, using part of the space currently occupied by the Post Office. We suggest that space could be released if the Post Office counter were to face into the courtyard rather than be contained within an enclosed room. **We invite the Accommodation and Works Committee to consider these proposals.**

38. Although the sandwich bar would be primarily a take-away facility, the seating provided for Despatch Box customers could also be used for sandwich bar customers. The lounges on the upper floors of Portcullis House could also be used,⁵³ as could the outdoor area between Portcullis House and Norman Shaw South (known as the North Terrace).⁵⁴ We are not convinced, however, by suggestions that an awning or other all-weather covered structure should be installed in the North Terrace.⁵⁵ We doubt that such a structure would be aesthetically acceptable, and the costs of heating it in winter could be high. Unlike the Terrace in the main building, the views are not inspiring. **The Portcullis House architect has, however, drawn up a modest planting scheme for the North Terrace, and we recommend that it be implemented in the next planting season.**

Norman Shaw buildings

39. No space has been allocated in either of the Norman Shaw buildings for a manned Refreshment Department outlet. The Serjeant at Arms doubted whether Norman Shaw South would lend itself to anything other than office accommodation,⁵⁶ but a number of suggestions were made by witnesses for new facilities, including the roof space of Norman Shaw South and the inner courtyard of Norman Shaw North.⁵⁷ Norman Shaw South is currently undergoing a substantial refit in order to provide new offices for 150 Members and staff. The roof space area alluded to by witnesses has already been set aside for two Members' offices. At the time of the inquiry there was only limited access to the site because of building works, but we understand that there is limited access to the roof space, there is not a great deal of floor space, and the ceilings are comparatively low. We do not therefore believe that this would prove to be a congenial or practical site for a refreshment facility.

40. The inner courtyard of Norman Shaw North is currently occupied by temporary huts providing training rooms for the Commons Library. It is certainly possible to picture a glass-roofed refreshment facility in the courtyard, but it was suggested to us by the Director of Estates that such a structure would be expensive and not in keeping with the Norman Shaw building which would surround it. Vehicle access would be very restricted. For these reasons, we do not see that the Norman Shaw North courtyard is a viable site for a refreshment facility, at least until there is a demonstrable need for a new cafeteria.

Vending machines

41. The only facilities within the Norman Shaw buildings will be vending machines. Until the closure of Norman Shaw South for refurbishment, there was a total of six vending machines at two different sites in the Norman Shaw buildings. Three of these machines had to be put into storage during the refurbishment of Norman Shaw South. **Before Norman Shaw South re-opens, we recommend that the Director of Catering Services and the Director of Estates identify suitable and convenient sites in the Norman Shaw buildings for the installation of new vending machines, ideally where communal seating is available.** Witnesses suggested that microwave ovens might also be provided for staff to heat up simple foods.⁵⁸ **We urge the Serjeant at Arms Department to ensure**

⁵³ Q 8.

⁵⁴ Q 148.

⁵⁵ QQ 52–4

⁵⁶ Q 61.

⁵⁷ Ev 30 and Q 159.

⁵⁸ Q 42. See also QQ 64–5.

that fridges and microwave ovens are provided in the Norman Shaw buildings for communal use.

42. The Secretaries' and Assistants Council told us that vending machines "should not be considered as an alternative to a proper meal";⁵⁹ that machines tended to "run short"; and that the choice of sandwiches was limited.⁶⁰ We note that the Director of Catering Services is examining the provision of vending machines throughout the Estate.

Facilities in 1 Parliament Street

Outline of the facilities in 1 Parliament Street

43. Refreshment Department premises in 1 Parliament Street consist of Bellamy's Cafeteria, essentially two adjoining areas with a total seating capacity of 159 (smoking is permitted in one of these areas); Bellamy's Clubroom, offering the same dishes as in the Cafeteria but in a more exclusive setting, accessible to Members and Officers throughout the week with up to three guests, and to all other passholders on Mondays and Fridays (with up to two guests for full passholders); Bellamy's Bar, which occupies a superb site overlooking the Palace and Parliament Square, and which is the only bar on the Estate operated by the Commons Refreshment Department open to all passholders;⁶¹ and the Astor Suite, providing banqueting facilities for Members and Officers.

44. The Committee undertook a tour of the premises in 1 Parliament Street to see how they might be made more attractive, thereby helping to relieve pressure on Portcullis House. The first floor of 1 Parliament Street has an intricate layout consisting of a muddle of fairly small rooms, interconnecting doors and corridors. This layout, together with structural considerations (including a lift-shaft sited in an awkward position), would restrict redevelopment.

Bellamy's Cafeteria

45. The Refreshment Department Survey showed Bellamy's Cafeteria to be operating below capacity, and witnesses told us that it was less busy now than previously.⁶² Fewer covers are served in Bellamy's than in any other cafeteria, even though it is convenient for approximately 150 Members and staff working in 1 Parliament Street⁶³ as well as the Commons Library staff working in Derby Gate.⁶⁴ To some extent Bellamy's suffers because of its proximity to the Debate; but the fittings are now somewhat dated and the servery has the "feel" of a canteen.

46. Until new facilities in 1 Parliament Street or in Portcullis House are introduced, efforts need to be made to attract custom to Bellamy's. We note that financial provision has been made for a refit of the kitchen and cafeteria areas in summer 2003. **We welcome the plans to refurbish Bellamy's Cafeteria. We make one specific suggestion, that curries (for which there is considerable demand) should be made a speciality at Bellamy's.**

Bellamy's Club Room

47. Many House staff told us that the Club Room was under-used and that either access restrictions should be lifted or the room should be put to a different use.⁶⁵ We note that the room seats 44 but that only 16 covers were served in the Club Room at lunch time on the

⁵⁹ Ev 6.

⁶⁰ QQ 41 and 44.

⁶¹ The Sports and Social Club provides a Bar for Club members, situated in Peers' Inner Court.

⁶² Q 41; Ev 42.

⁶³ Some 30 House staff also work in 1 Parliament Street.

⁶⁴ Approximately 165 Library staff.

⁶⁵ Q 1; Ev 30 and 54.

sitting day used for the Refreshment Department survey. Nonetheless, the Club Room is the only place north of Bridge Street where Members and their guests can be sure of getting a seat at lunch times without booking in advance. Given the steady concentration of Members at the northern end of the Parliamentary Estate, we expect that the Club Room will become more popular. **We recommend that the existing service in Bellamy's Club Room should be retained and that no change should be made to the regulations for access.**

Sandwich counter

48. The Souvenir Kiosk in the lobby on the first floor of 1 Parliament Street is closed except in the weeks leading up to Christmas. The kiosk and lobby look rather forlorn for the rest of the year and we suggest that better use could be made of the area. The kiosk, for instance, could sell ready-made sandwiches, juices and hot drinks,⁶⁶ and tables and chairs could be placed in the lobby. **We invite the Director of Catering Services to consider installing a sandwich counter in the space occupied by the Souvenir Kiosk on 1 Parliament Street.**

Facilities in 7 Millbank

49. Little of the evidence submitted to the inquiry related to facilities in 7 Millbank. The building is populated largely by House staff (and will be exclusively so from early 2003), and this is reflected in the profile of usage sketched by the Refreshment Department survey.⁶⁷ The cafeteria is busy but not excessively so, and the made-to-order sandwich facility is justly popular. Hansard staff are due to move to 7 Millbank later in 2002, and there will be more late-night working in the building as a result.⁶⁸ The Director of Catering Services has drawn up proposals to provide an evening service in the cafeteria but to close the waiter-service restaurant on the sixth floor of 7 Millbank—the Millbank Room—in the evenings, except for special “themed” events. A number of Members with offices in 7 Millbank were anxious about these proposals, but we note that no change in provision would be made before Members with offices currently in 7 Millbank had been transferred to other parts of the Estate.

III. Co-ordination with the House of Lords

50. We are very much aware of the shortage of space in the House of Lords and the difficulties of providing sufficient refreshment facilities for Members and staff of the Lords.⁶⁹ There are consequences for the Commons: the survey conducted by the Refreshment Department for the inquiry suggests that 6 per cent of custom in the Commons' refreshment facilities (in terms of covers served) is attributable to Members of the Lords, their staff and House of Lords staff.⁷⁰ The Terrace Cafeteria appears to be the preferred outlet,⁷¹ although the Serjeant at Arms suggested that Members of the Lords were “much taken with Portcullis House”.⁷² Lord Colwyn, Chairman of the House of Lords Refreshment Sub-committee, told us that “historically the Lords have always depended on the catering facilities of the Commons since our own are simply inadequate for the number of Members and staff we have”.⁷³ We accept this point and have no wish to see barriers imposed. In any case, the traffic is not one-way: the Lords Bar and Lords Staff Canteen are regularly used by staff based in the Commons.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Q 42; Ev 30 and 54.

⁶⁷ Ev 37.

⁶⁸ Q 71.

⁶⁹ Q 94.

⁷⁰ Ev 35.

⁷¹ 11% of covers served are to Members of the House of Lords, their staff or House of Lords staff: Ev 36.

⁷² Q 73.

⁷³ Ev 23.

⁷⁴ QQ 19 and 107.

51. Evidence—some of it anecdotal—suggested however that a prolonged closure of all Lords refreshment facilities last summer contributed to the intense pressure placed on the Terrace Cafeteria during the summer recess in 2001.⁷⁵ We note that the Lords Sub-committee has recommended that at least one Lords refreshment outlet should remain open throughout this year’s summer recess, and we welcome this proposal.⁷⁶ We also welcome efforts by the Chairman of this Committee and the Chairman of the Lords Refreshment Sub-committee to improve liaison. Officials of the Refreshment Departments in the two Houses have occasional contacts at an informal level. **We recommend that there should also be regular formal contact between senior officials in the Refreshment Departments of the two Houses, to co-ordinate provision across the Estate.**

IV. Access Regulations

Reasons for having access regulations

52. A number of issues relating to access provisions arose during the course of the inquiry. These are described below. We bear in mind that the ultimate decision on questions of access within the Commons rests with the Speaker.

53. Restrictions on access to refreshment facilities have been deemed necessary over the years because some facilities are simply not large enough to accommodate all those who might wish to use them. We were told that these regulations were sometimes infringed, with passholders occasionally entertaining large numbers of guests.⁷⁷ A member of the House staff working in the Pass Office told us that he had “yet to see anyone refused service (other than in facilities specifically for Members and Officers)” and that “customers are served who are not wearing a pass, are of a pass category who are not entitled to service, or are simply not passholders (particularly in Portcullis House)”.⁷⁸ On one occasion this same member of House staff observed 14 non-passholders being taken at peak time into the Debate Cafeteria in Portcullis House by a single passholder, even though access regulations allow a maximum of two guests.⁷⁹

Enforcement

54. Enforcement of access regulations is left to Refreshment Department staff, many of whom clearly feel that they do not have the authority to challenge unauthorised use of facilities. The Refreshment Department Catering Operations Manager confirmed that “it would be very difficult for the Refreshment Department to police [access] on a consistent basis, especially during peak times”.⁸⁰ We heard that, before the conversion and redevelopment of the Members’ and Strangers’ Cafeterias, a security officer used to stand by the door of the Strangers’ Cafeteria to monitor access.⁸¹ A similar level of ‘policing’ could be provided now for the Terrace Cafeteria and for the Debate Cafeteria in Portcullis House. However, we question whether the scale of abuse is so great as to warrant such a heavy-handed approach, which would incur costs probably to be borne by the Refreshment Department.⁸² The impression created by rigorous checking of passes would, we believe, be very negative. We note that the level of abuse of access regulations appeared not to be significant when the Refreshment Department conducted its survey. **We believe that the use of security officers to enforce access regulations is unnecessary at this stage and we do not support it.** Policy in this area may need to be reconsidered if there is evidence of growing abuse of regulations.

⁷⁵ Q 101.

⁷⁶ Q 100.

⁷⁷ Annex; also Ev 12.

⁷⁸ See Annex.

⁷⁹ Between 12 noon and 2pm only Members, Members’ spouses and Officers may take guests into the Debate Cafeteria.

⁸⁰ Q 29.

⁸¹ QQ 26–28.

⁸² QQ 68–9. We were told that the cost of hiring a security officer for two hours would be £21.00 (Ev 12).

Access for temporary passholders and contractors

55. Temporary passholders, many of whom are civil servants or works contractors, have restricted access to the House's refreshment facilities. In general, they may use cafeterias but may not take guests; but they are unable to use the Terrace Cafeteria between 12 noon and 2.00 pm. We can see that there used to be a rationale for this restriction; but it appears divisive. We hope that the measures proposed in this Report would ultimately allow all temporary passholders to use the Terrace Cafeteria at lunch times. We note that some long-term contractors employed by the House, although working under the same conditions as permanent staff, have only the restricted access to refreshment facilities granted to temporary staff.⁸³ **We invite Mr Speaker to consider allowing improved access to refreshment facilities for temporary staff of the House who work under the same conditions as permanent staff.** The Board of Management could usefully advise on the types of staff who might be granted improved levels of access. We suggest that there need be no delay in making such changes. Further distinctions may need to be made in categories of pass held.

56. There is a case for reducing access for short-term contractors (such as those hired on building contracts). The Serjeant at Arms could see no particular reason why such staff need actually be given access to Commons refreshment facilities.⁸⁴ Temporary cabins selling burgers are already provided for works contractors. We received a number of adverse comments about the influx of contractors in the Terrace Cafeteria during the 2001 summer recess.⁸⁵ The possibility that the House might in future sit for a number of weeks in September, maybe while limited works are in progress, would compound these problems. **We recommend that more temporary facilities and vending machines be provided for short-term contractors. The question of whether to permit access for this group may need to be reconsidered if there is continued evidence of overcrowding in refreshment facilities during recesses.**

Access for other House staff

57. It was put to us, in evidence from certain House staff and in the submission from the Commons Library branch of the Prospect Union, that the privileges accorded to Officers of the House were divisive and should be abolished.⁸⁶ We were told that such distinctions were hard to accept for long-serving staff at lower grades.⁸⁷ These points were often made in conjunction with a request for improved access rights to some of the more formal dining facilities, particularly when these appeared to be under-used.⁸⁸

58. There are occasions when senior House staff need to entertain on the House's behalf consultants, advisers to select committees, or foreign dignitaries, in a more exclusive setting. A certain level of access therefore needs to be safeguarded for Officers. Other House staff and Members' staff already have access to the Churchill Room and to the Adjournment restaurant on Thursday evenings and to the Strangers' Dining Room, the Churchill Room and the Adjournment on Fridays. **We propose that access rights for House staff and Members' staff should be extended to allow access to the Strangers' Dining Room on Thursday evenings.** At other, busier times of the week, there may simply not be spare capacity in these outlets, particularly if the House's sitting patterns change. **We recommend that the Director of Catering Services should monitor the spare capacity of table service restaurants in the House, with a view to improving access for all House staff and Members' staff where capacity allows.**

⁸³ Ev 11 and 55.

⁸⁴ Q 67.

⁸⁵ Q 152; Ev 55.

⁸⁶ Ev 31 and 53.

⁸⁷ Q 155.

⁸⁸ Q 153; Ev 2.

59. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association also asked for access to be granted to the Adjournment Restaurant for occasions when guests needed to be entertained “more modestly than in the Churchill Room, but still nicely”.⁸⁹ Both the CPA and the IPU play an important role in projecting the image of the Westminster Parliament abroad, and we are sympathetic to the request. We intend to consult further on this issue.

V. Peak pricing

60. At the start of the inquiry, we invited specific comment on pricing mechanisms. The concept of peak and off-peak pricing, by which higher prices might be charged at peak times (or lower prices at off-peak times), received almost no support from witnesses. The IPU suggested that they “would send out the wrong message”,⁹⁰ and others voiced similar concerns.⁹¹ The House’s Board of Management pointed out that some staff had “little or no discretion” about the time they took their meal breaks.⁹² The Refreshment Department User Group and the TUS took a similar line, although they were not opposed to the introduction of discounts at off-peak times.⁹³ However, we suspect that in practice, off-peak discounts would be seen as being no different from peak supplements. **In all, there is little to be said in favour of “peak” pricing, and we are opposed to the idea.** We suspect that it would be difficult to enforce.

VI. Conclusion

61. The questions of how to relieve pressure on the House’s refreshment facilities and how to spread demand more evenly across the Estate have proved to be complex ones. Our aim in this Report has been to provide an informed view from Members, on behalf of all those who work in the House, on how these questions should be addressed. We hope that our Report will make a useful contribution to the development of the House’s refreshment facilities.

⁸⁹ Ev 18.

⁹⁰ Ev 19.

⁹¹ Q 30; Ev 6 and 54.

⁹² Ev 12.

⁹³ Ev 1 and 31.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- (a) **We recommend that the Director of Catering Services, taking account of the detailed issues raised in evidence, should investigate ways of improving the flow of customers through the Terrace Cafeteria serving area. (Paragraph 22).**
- (b) **We believe that steps should be taken to attract more Members into the smaller Dining Room and the Churchill Room at lunch times. Some exclusive waiter-service provision for Members should be retained at lunch times, either at one end of the smaller Dining Room or in the Chess Room, which is currently under-used. Either a part of, or the whole of, the smaller Dining Room could then offer a competitively-priced buffet and other “quick” dishes to Members and their guests. We invite the Accommodation and Works Committee to consider our proposal for converting the Chess Room. (Paragraph 27).**
- (c) **We propose that the Churchill Room should at present remain as a waiter-service restaurant but that the Director of Catering Services should present options for different menu styles (paragraph 28).**
- (d) **Some form of replacement for the marquee on the Terrace which blends better with the stonework, or a glazed structure, would be more attractive when viewed from the river and less at the mercy of bad weather. A riverside restaurant or brasserie could then be provided for Members and their guests, freeing up space in the main building for staff use. We invite other Domestic Committees to submit their views on these proposals. We recommend that the Director of Catering Services and the Director of Estates should draw up proposals for an alternative structure on the Terrace, and that these proposals should be submitted for discussion with all bodies concerned (paragraph 30).**
- (e) **We recommend that all restrictions on access to the Press Cafeteria, the Press Dining Room and the Press Bar should be lifted. We further recommend that the Director of Catering Services should monitor usage of the Dining Room to ensure that an adequate level of access is preserved for members of the Press Gallery (paragraph 33).**
- (f) **We welcome the plans to modernise the Press Cafeteria, thereby improving the quality of the food (paragraph 34).**
- (g) **We believe that the Refreshment Department should concentrate on developing new facilities north of Bridge Street to attract people away from the Debate. (Paragraph 36).**
- (h) **We recommend that the Refreshment Department provide a made-to-order sandwich bar (perhaps with delicatessen, if space allows) somewhere at the northern end of the Parliamentary Estate. Our preferred site for such a facility would be a unit on the ground floor of Portcullis House, using part of the space currently occupied by the Post Office. We invite the Accommodation and Works Committee to consider these proposals (paragraph 37).**

- (i) **The Portcullis House architect has drawn up a modest planting scheme for the North Terrace, and we recommend that it be implemented in the next planting season. (Paragraph 38).**
- (j) **Before Norman Shaw South re-opens, we recommend that the Director of Catering Services and the Director of Estates identify suitable and convenient sites in the Norman Shaw buildings for the installation of new vending machines, ideally where communal seating is available. (Paragraph 41).**
- (k) **We urge the Serjeant at Arms Department to ensure that fridges and microwave ovens are provided in the Norman Shaw buildings for communal use (paragraph 41).**
- (l) **We welcome the plans to refurbish Bellamy's Cafeteria. We make one specific suggestion, that curries (for which there is considerable demand) should be made a speciality at Bellamy's (paragraph 46).**
- (m) **We recommend that the existing service in Bellamy's Club Room should be retained and that no change should be made to the regulations for access. (Paragraph 47).**
- (n) **We invite the Director of Catering Services to consider installing a sandwich counter in the space occupied by the Souvenir Kiosk on 1 Parliament Street. (Paragraph 48).**
- (o) **We recommend that there should be regular formal contact between senior officials in the Refreshment Departments of the two Houses, to co-ordinate provision across the Estate (paragraph 51).**
- (p) **We believe that the use of security officers to enforce access regulations is unnecessary at this stage and we do not support it. (Paragraph 54).**
- (q) **We invite Mr Speaker to consider allowing improved access to refreshment facilities for temporary staff of the House who work under the same conditions as permanent staff. (Paragraph 55).**
- (r) **We recommend that more temporary facilities and vending machines be provided for short-term contractors. The question of whether to permit access for this group may need to be reconsidered if there is continued evidence of overcrowding in refreshment facilities during recesses. (Paragraph 56).**
- (s) **We propose that access rights for House staff and Members' staff should be extended to allow access to the Strangers' Dining Room on Thursday evenings (paragraph 58).**
- (t) **We recommend that the Director of Catering Services should monitor the spare capacity of table service restaurants in the House, with a view to improving access for all House staff and Members' staff where capacity allows (paragraph 58).**
- (u) **In all, there is little to be said in favour of "peak" pricing, and we are opposed to the idea. (Paragraph 60).**

ANNEX

Summary by the Clerk of the Committee of evidence submitted by individual Members, Members' staff and House staff

Pressures, where and why they occur

- Regulations not properly enforced in the “debate” cafeteria in Portcullis House; nor in the Terrace Cafeteria *(House staff)*
- Too many research assistants bringing guests to the “Debate”, then using mobile phones *(House staff)*
- Cafeteria at 7 Millbank very busy at lunch times *(House staff)*
- Bellamy’s less crowded now that Portcullis House has opened *(House staff)*
- Pressures are due to the increasingly heavy workload on MPs and their staff. Peers working as hard, and need better access to refreshment facilities than they currently enjoy. *(MP)*
- Part of the problem is the total shutdown of the House of Lords refreshment department facilities during summer recess. *(House staff)*
- Large queues tend to form in Terrace Cafeteria, not apparently connected to seating capacity *(House staff)*
- Knock-on effect from loss of Westminster Hall Cafeteria *(House staff)*
- Closure of Westminster Hall Cafeteria “very damaging”, please reverse if possible *(Peers' staff)*
- During recesses, access should be more strictly controlled to prevent cluttering by unauthorised people. *(House staff)*
- A lot of temporary pass holders in Terrace Cafeteria *(Members' staff)*
- Debate and Terrace Cafeteria very crowded at peak times *(Members' staff)*
- Demand is often overstretched by Metropolitan Police officers and Security officers, who all have their own messes and kitchens in the Palace *(House staff)*
- Crowding in the service area of the Terrace Cafeteria is made worse by the 'crossing' of traffic at the tills - getting water, coffee, drinks, puddings etc while people queue to pay. *(House staff)*
- Rules often not enforced: lots of outside visitors are taken to the Debate by staff and MPs between 12.00pm and 2.00pm. *(House staff)*
- Terrace Cafeteria clearly struggles to cope with demand *(Members' staff)*
- Closure of Lords refreshment facilities during recesses puts pressure on Commons Refreshment Department *(House staff)*
- Access regulations not enforced: “I have yet to see anyone refused service (other than in facilities specifically for Members and Officers)...customers are served who are not wearing a pass, are of a pass category who are not entitled to service, or are simply not pass holders (particularly in Portcullis House)”. Staff from Govt. departments use House catering facilities in lieu of their own facilities. *(House staff)*
- “Today at 12.18 pm I saw 14 non pass holders being taken into the Debate by a single full pass holder. Every one was then individually served” [regulations allow only Members, Members' spouses and Officers to take guests between 12.00pm and 2.00pm, maximum of two] *(House staff)*
- Members entertain large numbers of guests in the “Debate”, or work at tables *(House staff)*
- Loss of Westminster Hall cafeteria had far-reaching consequences *(House staff)*
- Facilities are sometimes crowded but at other times staff seem under-used. Better management would respond to patterns of custom. Numbers of staff serving do not increase to cope with increased demand at peak times *(MP)*
- Terrace Cafeteria does sometimes get crowded, about 1.00 to 2.00. *(House staff)*

- Debate “always busy and seems to be getting busier”; not a relaxing experience as you feel that you have to move on to let others eat *(Members’ staff)*
- Overcrowding means that you cannot linger or relax *(House staff)*
- Terrace Cafeteria and Debate are busy because food is good and cheap; Bellamy’s is less busy as it has a limited range of food, especially salads, and a less attractive environment *(House staff)*
- Too much space in Terrace Cafeteria devoted to “Members only” section *(House staff)*
- Number of researchers seems to be increasing *(House staff)*
- Overcrowding getting worse despite overall increase in number of facilities: closure of Westminster Hall Cafeteria is one cause; more generally, was the rise in demand foreseen and did the House provide as necessary? *(House staff)*
- Terrace Cafeteria service area is poorly laid out (particularly hot beverages area, which gets congested); seating area reserved for Members is often under-used *(House staff)*
- Queues form because there are not enough facilities for staff *(Members’ staff)*
- A lot of Members’ staff use Terrace Cafeteria but could use other outlets on the Parliamentary Estate *(MP)*
- Strangers Bar grossly overcrowded, partly because rules on usage are not observed, partly because of design. Arguments develop. Certain Members repeatedly ignore rules on number of guests; some Members’ staff and journalists are regulars *(MP)*
- Custom appears to exceed design capacity in Portcullis House outlets *(MP)*
- Not enough cashiers at busy times in the Terrace Cafeteria; third till should be open all through summer; hot beverages section not well organised - users have to backtrack. *(House staff)*
- Can’t always get space in Adjournment in Portcullis House - are access rules being abused? *(MP)*

Access rules (other than enforcement)

- Rules are confusing. The use of notifications (as with the Terrace Pavilion in Summer) inviting use outside of normal rules is most welcome. *(House staff)*
- Privileges for Officers are objectionable. Rights to bring guests to Bellamy’s etc should be on an equal basis (either limited to starting before 12.30 or with a limited number of tickets on a first come first served basis) *(House staff (Officer))*
- Do not reduce access to existing catering facilities for staff and their visitors. When I am called away to vote, or to see a Minister urgently, I have to ask my Parliamentary Assistant to meet and look after visitors/constituents. If my Assistant cannot take a visitor to the Terrace Cafeteria, then I will have to risk missing votes and important briefing meetings to take them to the Pugin Room. *(MP)*
- A ban on contractors using facilities would not be realistic. There are many varieties of contractors from hard-hat types to agency typists, and it would be unfair to discriminate. *(House staff)*
- Barring staff below Officer rank from certain outlets in Portcullis House is undemocratic *(House staff)*
- Restricted access (e.g. to Officers) smacks of military-style elitism *(House staff)*
- Do not reduce facility for staff to bring guests to Terrace Cafeteria *(Members’ staff)*
- Terrace Cafeteria is the only "ordinary café" within the Palace building which is available for taking guests of Peers. It is vital that it continues to provide this service. *(Peer)*
- Access to Commons catering facilities should be available to Lords and Commons staff on equal terms *(Lords staff)*
- Restricting access to restaurants in the Main Building for some grades of staff but not for others is divisive *(House staff)*
- Restricting access for staff on temporary contracts seems unfair *(House staff)*
- Difficult for House staff who are not Officers to find somewhere to entertain friends at lunch times *(House staff)*

- The ban on contractors using the Terrace Cafeteria during the summer recess between 12 and 2pm was unfair - workmen were giving staff money and asking them to buy food. The alternative - going elsewhere (within the Estate or outside) is time-consuming or expensive. *(House staff)*
- There is no Commons Bar staffed by the Refreshment Department open to all full passholders *(House staff)*
- Not all contractors are workmen: some are doing important work for the House but, because they are not full passholders, have limited access and have to be escorted in Refreshment Department premises at certain times; please reclassify some contractors' passes *(House staff)*
- Terrace Cafeteria is the only place in the main building where all staff can eat and can take guests *(House staff)*
- Barring access to certain facilities for staff can seem demeaning, although there may well be reasons of security, availability of space and staffing levels *(House staff)*
- Why can't Peers use the Churchill Room? It is hardly ever full *(Peer)*
- Please retain access for Peers who are former Members of the Commons; enables contact between the two Houses without adding too much pressure on facilities *(Peer)*
- Temporary staff should not be subject to different access regime *(MP)*
- Grant full access to Commons facilities for Members' spouses or partners *(MP)*
- Two-tier system of access is undemocratic *(Members' staff)*
- Too many researchers/non-Members on the Terrace: access should be for Members and a limited number of guests only *(MP)*
- Could former MPs (such as my predecessor) have access to the "Debate"? *(MP)*
- Staff should have same rights of access as Officers and spouses *(MP)*

Ideas for reducing the crush (other than enforcement of access regulations)

- Separate till for takeaway food *(House staff)*
- Strangers Cafeteria could accommodate many more people if dividing "banquette" screen were to be moved (reducing area reserved for Members) *(House staff)*
- Make more use of Bellamy's Clubroom *(House staff)*
- Realign Strangers Cafeteria: "On Friday last we found it difficult to find space to sit down, whilst the area for Members and officers had two people sitting at one table" *(House staff)*
- More facilities should be open during recess to avoid current crushes in the Terrace Cafeteria. *(House staff)*
- Better use of areas where access is currently restricted (e.g. Principal Floor main building, N end of Terrace) *(House staff)*
- Bellamy's Clubroom should either be open access or it should be incorporated into the existing eating area. *(House staff)*
- More tables in Portcullis House atrium; use space outside "adjournment" for debate customers; also treat outdoor terrace as proper Refreshment Department facility *(House staff)*
- House should actively encourage staggered lunch breaks. Staff who work shifts should be encouraged to take their break from 11-12am or from 2-3pm, although this would mean that the Refreshment Dept would have to provide the lunch service for a longer period during the day. *(House staff)*
- Restrict access for contractors to Terrace Cafeteria at breakfast times (e.g. before 9.00 only) to deal with overcrowding in mornings. *(House staff)*
- Special till for takeaway service please; "very frustrating to have to queue up behind several people when you have only got a sandwich" *(House staff)*
- Long queues to pay in Terrace Cafeteria mean food gets cold while you wait - could there be a separate queue for sandwiches/cold food? *(House staff)*
- Redeploy staff serving food in Terrace Cafeteria: staff serving at "Members only" point are under-worked; main courses for staff served by only one person, slows up queue *(House staff)*

- Members' eating area in Terrace Cafeteria is not as well used as the staff area, which is very overcrowded at peak times. *(House staff)*
- On three occasions recently, the non-Member part of the Terrace Cafeteria was overcrowded, whilst the Members-only section had four people in it, two of whom were not Members *(House staff)*
- Staff from Govt. departments should only be entitled to a tea/coffee shop facility. *(House staff)*
- Churchill Room is quiet at lunch times: perhaps use it for a Terrace Cafeteria look-alike *(House staff)*
- Bellamy's Club Room and the lounge between the Club Room and the bar are currently not well used *(House staff)*
- Assess the respective crowding in the Members' and staff areas of the Terrace Cafeteria: is the dividing line in the right place? Should there be more space on the staff side? *(House staff)*
- No need for separate section for Members and their guests in Terrace Cafeteria when there are so many other eating outlets for Members to use. *(House staff)*
- Waiter-served facilities at lunch times (such as those with restricted access, e.g. Bellamy's Clubroom) are under-used *(House staff)*
- Not always possible to stagger lunch times, and it does not seem to make much difference lately anyway *(House staff)*
- Perhaps integrate Members' and staff sections of Terrace Cafeteria, to make it open plan. All No smoking please *(House staff)*
- Increase seating in the atrium of Portcullis House as the food is excellent there *(Lords staff)*
- Alert people to "jump the queue" facility for light foods in Debate *(Members' staff)*
- More seating in Portcullis House atrium *(Members' staff)*
- Members' area of Terrace Cafeteria often fairly empty while staff area is packed; screen could be moved (or removed) *(House staff)*
- Staggering lunch hours is not easy: staff work to the requirements of colleagues and of Members *(House staff)*
- Either enlarge Strangers Bar or relax access regulations *(MP)*
- Use space on Terrace more efficiently in summer - north end is always empty, furniture is very bulky *(House staff)*
- Spare capacity seems to be in areas reserved for Members and Officers *(House staff)*
- If Norman Shaw South is to become Members' offices, will we need a refreshment facility in Norman Shaw? *(House staff)*
- Please do not place too much emphasis on the needs of Members at the expense of staff *(House staff)*
- Test wider access to restricted facilities, on a trial basis (annual/biennial review?). Increase in demand might not be excessive and would ease pressure elsewhere; staff could be redistributed accordingly. *(House staff)*
- Pricing differentials would prevent interns eating with staff and staff eating with MPs. *(Members' staff)*
- "Debate" overcrowded because the quality of food is high: so improve the quality of alternative venues (Terrace Cafeteria, Bellamy's) *(MP)*
- Remove partition in Terrace Cafeteria *(MP)*
- Open up restricted facilities (e.g. Annie's Bar, Members' Tearoom, Bellamy's Clubroom and Terrace Pavilion Bar) to non-Members *(MP)*
- Expand facilities, for instance in Westminster Hall or Norman Shaw South *(MP)*
- Remove second serving area in Tearoom - it's never used and could provide more table space *(MP)*
- Price indexing could penalise people who have specific food requirements (e.g. coeliacs) and who rely on certain outlets which best serve their needs *(MP)*
- Wholly opposed to increasing prices to manage demand: Members have no choice about where they can go for refreshment, other than in the Palace. Looking at the category of person entitled to use particular facilities is the correct way forward *(MP)*

- Give precedence in Portcullis House to those who work in the building; police numbers of guests more rigorously (MP)

Quality of food and service

- Terrace Cafeteria has good range of food; hot food not always hot; Salads limited in Bellamy's; "Debate" Cafeteria lacks decent vegetables & cheap interesting salads; good atmosphere but the standard of hot food is "not that brilliant" - often a bit dry & sauceless. (Members' staff)
- "Debate" Cafeteria "is an excellent cafeteria, much better than Strangers/Bellamy's. It would be fantastic if the same service could be offered in the other cafeterias." (Members' staff)
- Long delays in getting food served in the evenings in Members' Tearoom: not enough coverage in the kitchens. Staff are very courteous, though. (MP)
- "Debate" is excellent and the other canteens are indifferent to poor (Members' staff)
- Better provision of food please in Members' Tearoom on sitting Fridays (MP)
- Facilities are very good indeed (MP)
- "Debate" takes healthy eating to "aggressive lengths": nearly all the dishes are small in quantity and dry with some sauce; "nearly always potato wedges of some kind; the sandwiches appear all to be something like Ciabatta with salsa and courgettes. On the upside, the staff are uniformly nice!" (MP)
- Bellamy's food "excellent in quality, variety and price". Staff good too. (House staff)
- Service is very variable in the Members Dining Room in the evening - meals, even from the quick menu, can take half an hour. Portions of vegetable and potatoes in MDR are often far too small. More consistency would encourage customers. (House staff)
- Service is very slow in the Millbank Room. It is particularly difficult to get away within a 'lunch hour'. (House staff)
- Tearoom and Dining Rooms are "really marvellous" and the standard of food is "quite excellent" (MP)
- Not many veg in "Debate", other than parsnip chips (Members' staff)
- Very impressed by the standard of House Of Commons catering. But could something please be done to ensure a better range and quality of wines on offer to Members and staff? (MP)
- Portcullis House facilities are excellent and the Refreshment Department should be proud of it. (House staff)
- "Debate" salads in little plastic containers are expensive and very off putting; food in the Terrace Cafeteria is sometimes cold and a bit congealed (Members' staff)
- Portcullis House catering sets a benchmark; well balanced range of food (MP)
- Members' Tearoom staff always under pressure: rethink needed (MP)
- Quality of food and presentation is generally very good; excellent service. Debate Cafeteria fare "rather unchanging" - always a flattened piece of pork or turkey, something in a bun, and for vegetables either parsnips (irrespective of season) or potato wedges (Members' staff)
- New system in Members' Tearoom (i.e. waiting at table for food order) does not work well (MP)
- Not enough variety in types of food served in different cafeterias (MP)
- Bellamy's becomes very hot (particularly in the serving area) in summer: better air-conditioning is needed (Members' staff)
- Terrace Cafeteria now "most unpleasant": standard and quality of food has deteriorated enormously, most staff are most unpleasant and unhelpful. Prices too high, chicken breast (House of Commons chickens no longer have legs or thighs) tasteless and obviously bought in large caterers' packs (Members' staff)
- Bellamy's is very pleasant, staff are most helpful, the food is quite good but too often items on the menu (particularly grilled whole plaice) are not available. (Members' staff)

- Debate Cafeteria food is excellent (particularly the fish) but very limited and a great lack of green vegetables. *(Members' staff)*
- Staff consistently helpful despite enormous pressure *(MP)*
- Vegetarian options in "Debate" not good *(MP)*
- Non-smoking area in Bellamy's Bar is much appreciated *(House staff)*
- Quality, pricing & locations of facilities are truly excellent *(House staff)*
- Terrace Cafeteria cashiers are in a permanent state of confusion, shouting orders into the kitchen, fiddling with spoons, and generally very surly *(House staff)*
- Not enough different wines served in Pugin Room (white wines) or in Smoking Room *(MP)*
- Vegetarian dishes limited and unimaginative *(MP)*
- Millbank Room remains one of the best value sites, and is very convenient for Lords staff. *(Lords staff)*
- Excellent facilities; courtesy and service of all staff appreciated *(MP)*
- Food in terrace much improved recently, but gets cold while queuing *(House staff)*
- Quality in Portcullis Cafeteria in 7 Millbank declined when Members moved out *(House staff)*
- 'Choose your own sandwich' option is best feature of Portcullis Cafeteria in 7 Millbank *(House staff)*
- Terrace Cafeteria staff seem demoralised and as a result service is extremely poor *(House staff)*
- Overall the quality of food is generally good - theme days a good idea. Prices generally good value despite recent increases. Salad pricing not always clear *(House staff)*
- Standard very good *(Peer)*
- Facilities generally of a high quality; staff give first class service. Sometimes long waits in Members' Tearoom, suggesting that facilities are overstretched. Perhaps number the tables? *(MP)*
- Refreshment Department staff "do not appear to be sufficiently trained, do not operate as an efficient unit and lack the leadership and direction of good management" *(MP)*
- Please provide a breakfast-type meal (e.g. bacon and egg snack) throughout the day in the Terrace Cafeteria (takes too long in Members' Tearoom) *(MP)*
- Terrace Cafeteria serving staff not generally polite (with exceptions) *(House staff)*
- Long waits for main dishes to be replenished in Portcullis Cafeteria, 7 Millbank *(House staff)*
- Longer-serving staff are not as obliging as new staff e.g. in Portcullis House *(MP)*
- Members' Dining Room has high staff turnover - staff don't always understand, slow orders *(MP)*

Other suggestions

- Longer opening hours please on Fridays and non-sitting days, for at least one of the cafeterias on the Estate, snacks would be enough. *(Members' staff)*
- Cafeteria in 7 Millbank needs to be open later and during recesses. *(House staff)*
- Nowhere for school groups to eat packed lunches: set up tables in Portcullis House atrium or Westminster Hall *(MP)*
- Terrace Cafeteria opens too late for some staff - 8.30 start would help a lot *(Lords staff)*
- Please open Bellamy's in the evenings: there is nowhere that is not a canteen for entertaining friends in the evenings (SDR is expensive) *(MP)*
- Nowhere to eat in the main building on a Friday after 3pm; quality of food from vending machines not particularly high; please consider offering light food (sandwiches, scrambled eggs, beans on toast for example) coffee, tea and soft drinks on Friday afternoons somewhere on the Estate - possibly Portcullis House? *(Members' staff)*
- No refreshment facilities available for members of the public here on parliamentary business (e.g. petitioners against private bills, who may need to attend Bill Committees daily for several weeks in order to give and hear evidence). Perhaps set aside a room for people to eat packed lunches, or grant access to a Cafeteria (perhaps by special application in each case) *(House staff)*
- Please provide a few tables in facilities in the main building which Members can use to entertain guests without having to pre-book *(MP)*

- Please provide some bookable space in the Pugin Room (MP)
- A pity that conventions make it difficult for Members from different parties to dine together in Members' Dining Room (MP)
- Abolish dress code (MP)
- No smoking in refreshment areas (MP)
- Allow photography as long as only members of the party are included (MP)
- Allow mobile phones in Terrace, Bellamy's and "Debate" Cafeterias (MP)
- More vending machines in Norman Shaw North please with better choice of food (Members' staff)
- Too much plastic wrapping in the "Debate": unnecessary and time-consuming for staff to have every salad portion individually wrapped. Plastic cutlery also. (House staff)
- "It is ridiculous and expensive that there are two catering businesses being run from within the Parliamentary estate." (Peer)
- Could there be a Café Dome or Café Rouge outlet, serving good modern fresh food and coffee in more informal surroundings. Also, could there be a sandwich bar that sells freshly made sandwiches and more imaginative vegetarian food. (Peer)
- Offer an all-day (or most of the day) breakfast service in Bellamy's (more "flexible" for people with dietary restrictions) (Members' staff)
- "It does not fit in well with Westminster to see people carrying food and drink to their places of work" (Peer)
- Jackets and ties should be worn in Strangers Dining Room (Peer)
- Please improve the range of products in Norman Shaw North vending machines (MP)
- Please extend opening hours during recesses (MP)
- Wine list quality needs to be improved; banqueting menus could be more imaginative (MP)
- More facilities such as Pugin Room needed for Members to entertain guests (MP)
- Portcullis House catering sets a benchmark; well balanced range of food (MP)
- Members' Tearoom staff always under pressure: rethink needed (MP)
- Lack of handle on inside of entrance doors to Terrace Cafeteria is very irritating (House staff)
- Please advertise themed days more widely and more in advance (House staff)
- Services should be contracted out, maybe just one or two outlets to start with; maybe generate competition by using more than one contractor at any one time (MP)
- How can we justify press canteen? (MP)

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE RELATING TO THE REPORT

WEDNESDAY 10 JULY 2002

Members present:

Mr Dennis Turner (in the Chair)

Mr Ronnie Campbell
Tony Cunningham

Mrs Janet Dean
Mr Lindsay Hoyle

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report [Refreshment Facilities in the House of Commons], proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 61 read and agreed to.

Annex agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Several Papers were ordered to be appended to the Minutes of Evidence.

Ordered, That the Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee be reported to the House.—(*The Chairman.*)

* * * *

[Adjourned to a day and time to be fixed by the Chairman.]

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