



HOUSE OF LORDS

Information Committee

Information Committee Annual Report 2007–2008

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Annual Report 2007–2008

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

What is the purpose of this report?

1. The purpose of this report is to inform Members about the activities of the Information Committee during the 2007–08 Session in advising and supporting the House’s information and communication services.¹
2. We have produced this report in response to the 2007 review of the internal governance of the House of Lords, prepared for the Lord Speaker and the House Committee. In that review, Lord Tordoff and Lord Hunt of Wirral recommended that domestic committees “make more use than they have done hitherto of their power to report to the House, either on specific issues of interest, or by way of providing annual or sessional accounts of their activities.”²

Background

3. The Information Committee is one of the five domestic committees of the House.³ Its terms of reference are:

“To consider information and communications services, including the Library and Parliamentary Archives, within the strategic framework and financial limits approved by the House Committee”.
4. The House has agreed that the domestic committees should “function primarily as user groups, actively canvassing the views of Members and providing a forum within which they can make complaints or suggestions about services”. The services that the Information Committee is concerned with are:
 - The Parliamentary Information and Communication Technology service (PICT)
 - Library services in the House
 - Information services for Members, including Hansard
 - Public information about the House and its work, including outreach
 - Bicameral services, including the parliamentary website, parliamentary outreach, visitor services, the education service and the broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings
 - The Parliamentary Archives

¹ The membership of our Committee is given in Appendix 1.

² The report and a memorandum considered by the House Committee are available on the House of Lords intranet at <http://pubs1.tso.parliament.uk/pa/h07081.pdf>

³ The other domestic committees are the House Committee, the Administration and Works Committee, the Refreshment Committee and the Works of Art Committee.

How the Committee works

5. The Committee considers current levels of services and makes recommendations for change. Any Committee recommendation that requires significant unbudgeted expenditure would also need approval by the House Committee. The Committee has thirteen members (see Appendix 1) and meets approximately six times a year. It meets in private to discuss issues with senior officials responsible for the services listed in paragraph 4 above. Agendas and minutes of the meetings are published on the intranet.⁴ In the next Session we plan to establish our own page on the parliamentary website, like other domestic committees.

Working with the administration on business planning

6. The House Committee approves the House's strategic, business and financial plans. The Information Committee "considers information and communications services within the strategic framework and financial limits approved by the House Committee." In their report on internal governance, Lord Tordoff and Lord Hunt of Wirral raised the option of creating a formal opportunity for domestic committees to input into the development of plans for the delivery of services to Members. The Information Committee adopted this proposal and decided that it should input into the business planning processes of the House's Information Services.
7. In July Committee Members attended planning meetings in the three offices within Information Services (the Information Office, the Library and the Parliamentary Archives), and in October the Committee reviewed the draft business plans of those offices. Such timing allowed the Committee to comment on office plans before the budgets for the forthcoming year had been finalised. This initiative was judged to be a success both by us and the areas of the administration involved, and we concluded that we should repeat the exercise next year.
8. We are currently developing this model further so that, in conjunction with the House of Commons, we could offer support to the Commons-led shared services within the Committee's remit (e.g. the Broadcasting Unit and the Education Service) in shaping future services. We also intend to input into future PICT business plans.

Working with individual services

9. From next Session, individual members of the Committee will focus their interest on one or two of the services with which the Committee is concerned. Members will visit the teams to see their work, meet staff and discuss developments and/or look at key strategic papers. The arrangement will not pre-empt or circumnavigate existing lines of management or accountability; it will operate with a light touch and on an informal basis only.
10. We hope that this change will facilitate closer links between members of the Committee and individual offices. We will use the *Red Benches* newsletter (see paragraph 13) to canvas the views of other Members and report back to them. Committee members will thereby be able to act as conduits or

⁴ <http://intranet.parliament.uk/lords/business-of-the-house/committees/domestic-committees/information>

informal contact points between Members of the House and the services in question.

Working with the House of Commons

11. A number of the services with which we are concerned are provided on a bicameral basis (e.g. by PICT, the Broadcasting Unit, and the Education Service). Where appropriate, we work with the House of Commons Administration Committee to ensure a joined-up approach in these areas. For example, in March 2008 we held an informal joint meeting at which we discussed improvements to the parliamentary website.

Working with other parliaments

12. The Committee is keen to learn from the experiences of other parliaments in relation to information and communication services. In examining a proposal that Members be allowed to use visual aids to support their speeches during Grand Committee proceedings in the Moses Room (see paragraph 24), the Committee drew upon the experience of other parliaments that allow visual aids. Members have also attended a number of international conferences on behalf of the House.

Red Benches

13. A regular newsletter, *Red Benches*, is produced on behalf of the five domestic committees. Paper copies are available from the Library and the Printed Paper Office, and an electronic version is available on the House of Lords intranet.⁵

Conclusion

14. **We make this report to the House for information. This is the first annual report we have produced of our activities, and we hope that Members find it informative and interesting. We are pleased to report that the House's administration has made major progress during the 2007-08 Session in the information and communication services it provides for Members and the public. We hope that other Members share this view. We always welcome feedback from Members, which we can pass on to the staff of the House. We take this opportunity to remind Members that if they have suggestions, views or queries related to information and communication services that they would like the Committee to consider, they are welcome to contact the Committee either by email (holinfocttee@parliament.uk), by writing to our Chairman, or by speaking to any of us informally.**

⁵ <http://intranet.parliament.uk/intranet/lords/business-of-the-house/committees/domestic-committees/red-benches.shtml>

CHAPTER 2: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

PICT performance reports

15. The Parliamentary Information and Communication Technology Department (PICT) was established on 1 January 2006 and came into legal effect as the first joint department of both Houses of Parliament on 1 April 2008. The Information Committee receives regular performance reports from PICT, based on national benchmark standards. The Committee also considers PICT's annual report and proposes to have an input into future PICT business plans.

PICT 'health check'

16. In 2007 the review by Sir Kevin Tebbit of the management and services of the House of Commons noted the progress that had been made in improving IT services but expressed concerns about the scale of PICT's ambition (PICT's mission is to provide "a fully joined up information management strategy for Parliament") and the costs of PICT's operations as a whole. In view of this report, the Joint Business Systems Board (JBSB), the management forum set up by the two Houses to oversee PICT, commissioned an external review (known as the 'health check') of the Houses' plans for IT development and PICT's capacity to deliver.
17. The Committee held a special meeting to consider the contents of the health check report and took note of the response to the review prepared by the JBSB and adopted by the Management Boards of the two Houses. The Reading Clerk, who chairs the JBSB, and the Director of PICT appeared before the Committee to present the documents and answer questions. The actions taken by way of response will be reported to the Committee in due course.⁶

Development of the wireless network on the Parliamentary estate

18. Wireless services are available in the Royal Gallery, Library Reading Rooms and the Chamber. The Committee has asked PICT to pursue a feasibility study for further wireless installations on the Parliamentary estate.

Members' computing issues

19. The Committee regularly raises computing issues with the Director of PICT. Recent examples include the lack of compatibility between documents produced in Microsoft 2007 and the current system on the Parliamentary network, which will be resolved in conjunction with Microsoft; and the need to increase the size of Members' email boxes, which has been agreed.

⁶ The review can be found on the intranet at:
http://intranet.parliament.uk/intranet/assets/PICT_review_july08.doc

CHAPTER 3: LIBRARY SERVICES

Extra computers in the Library

20. In January 2007, the Information Committee asked for extra computing resources for Members in the Library, and, following trials in the Salisbury Room and in the Truro Room, agreed that, on the basis of feedback from Members, the four extra workstations should remain in the Truro Room.

Library facilities in 1 Millbank

21. The Committee approved the proposed library facilities in 1 Millbank following its refurbishment. There will be a Members Library on the ground floor, which will replace the current library outlet in 2 Millbank, and an enhanced research team on the seventh-floor. These facilities have been planned in the light of Members' stated needs and requirements, drawing on the Survey of Members' Needs in 2004, the Survey of Library Research Services in 2006, and a range of feedback from individual Members.
22. The proposed Members Library on the ground floor has been planned in two parts, a quiet Reading and Writing Room for Members, and an e-Library. The Reading and Writing Room, staffed by the Reference and Research teams, will provide facilities and services similar to those in the main Library suite in the Palace of Westminster. The plans currently provide for some 30 spaces with workstations for Members in this Room. The e-Library space will provide a flexible area with about 20 workstations and some wall-mounted plasma screens, giving Members and their staff access to online training, information resources and email. An exhibition of the key features of the plan was held in the Royal Gallery in July.

Future Library services

23. In July 2008, Members of the Committee attended the Library staff's business planning meeting, which focussed on four development areas: a virtual library; new products and user guides; the designs for the proposed library facilities in 1 Millbank; and continued rationalisation of the Library's collections. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the Library and its plans for the future. Last Session, we supported the introduction of Library email alerts and Library Notes on topics for Thursday debates. At the business planning meeting we were pleased to note the positive feedback from other Members on these new products and made suggestions to develop these initiatives. At a subsequent meeting, the Committee considered a draft of the Library's 2009 business plan and had a further opportunity to input into the Library's plans.

CHAPTER 4: INFORMATION SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

Visual aids to debate

24. The Committee examined a proposal that Members be allowed to use visual aids to support their speeches during Grand Committee proceedings in the Moses Room. The Committee's view was that visual aids might be useful in supporting debate during the committee stage of complex public bills by illustrating speeches on amendments. They might also be suitable for use during other proceedings in Grand Committee, such as questions for short debates and debates on select committee reports. Committee reports often include tables and charts; and it might prove helpful for these to be visually accessible during the debate.
25. We recognised that allowing members to use visual aids in Grand Committee would have significant implications for the House's procedures and so referred the proposal to the Procedure Committee. That Committee concluded that, whilst the House should not resist the opportunities presented by new technology, the Grand Committee was not the right forum for introducing visual aids. The Procedure Committee has invited the Information Committee to undertake further work on possible uses of visual aids, with a particular emphasis on Select Committees and other evidence-taking committees. We will pursue this work next Session.

Hansard

26. The Committee approved proposals to modify some elements of the layout of the printed Hansard. The revised layout, which will take effect from the start of the 2008–09 Session, will provide a clearer indication of the type of debate and make the start of debate on each clause and amendment stand out more. The changes should also lead to more detailed web indexing in due course.
27. The Committee asked the Editor of Debates to investigate whether it might be possible for Members to submit corrections to Hansard electronically, rather than in person. As a result, a pilot exercise is now underway for Members to submit electronic corrections to draft speeches in Hansard. Members who wish to do so can find the entire text online on the same day on the 'Today in the Lords' page of the parliamentary website,⁷ approximately three hours behind real time. Any corrections can be discussed with the sub-editors on the day to ensure that they are included for publication. Members who wish to receive emailed copies of their speeches for checking before publication should make a specific request on the day to extension 3031 or holhansard@parliament.uk.
28. The Committee has asked that a pilot be developed to link the online text of Hansard with the archived webcasts of the Chamber to enable users to watch, listen to and read a past debate at the same time. The Committee will review the results of the pilot demonstrator and then consider whether to take the exercise further.

⁷ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldtoday/home.html>

CHAPTER 5: PUBLIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE HOUSE OF LORDS AND ITS WORK

Outreach

29. In October, the Committee endorsed a three-year strategy and programme for House of Lords outreach and engagement for 2008–11. The strategy outlines plans to connect external audiences with Members and the work of the House of Lords through outreach visits, events within Parliament, online initiatives and cross-platform projects. In the 2008–09 Session the programme will build on and develop successful activities such as the Peers in Schools initiative and the Lord Speaker's competition, whilst also piloting new ways to engage young people and other target audiences.
30. Our Chairman, Lord Renton of Mount Harry, is also a member of the Lord Speaker's Outreach Advisory Group, an informal cross-party group of Members that meets about six times a year to advise the Lord Speaker on the development and implementation of the outreach and engagement strategy.
31. The Committee commends Parliament's new YouTube channel to those Members who have not yet seen it⁸ and welcomes the 'Lords of the Blog' site, developed and hosted by the Hansard Society.⁹

Use of the Chamber

32. On 2 May 2008 the Chamber of the House of Lords was used by Members of the UK Youth Parliament to debate their campaign priorities for the year ahead. The debates were chaired by the Lord Speaker and attended by a number of Peers, MPs, government officials and other guests. The event attracted over 100 articles in the media and was broadcast on BBC Parliament. The event was the second pilot event in the Chamber. The first pilot took place on 12 May 2007 when the Chamber was used for the English-Speaking Union's Schools Debating Competition.
33. The Committee has since recommended to the Administration and Works Committee that the Chamber be used for appropriate events for young people on an annual basis. This decision was taken on the understanding that the use of the Chamber is to remain special and occasional (not more than once a year); that advice will continue to be sought from the Information Committee; and that a further review of the programme will be undertaken in 2011.

⁸ <http://uk.youtube.com/ukparliament>

⁹ <http://www.lordsoftheblog.net/>

CHAPTER 6: BICAMERAL SERVICES FOR THE PUBLIC

The parliamentary website

34. The Committee has welcomed a wide range of improvements to the parliamentary website: www.parliament.uk. The Committee is particularly excited by the programme of virtual tours being developed, which allow people to explore some of Parliament's famous buildings and learn about the current work and history of Parliament. Tours of the House of Lords Chamber and Library are already available.¹⁰ The whole Visitor Route, and areas where the public can visit on request, should be replicated virtually by the end of 2009.

Parliamentary Outreach

35. In July 2007 we recommended the establishment of regional parliamentary outreach officers. A team of four regional outreach officers started working in July 2008 in two start-up regions—Yorkshire and the Humber, and the East of England. It is planned that, by 2010–11, there will be twelve regional outreach officers covering all regions of the UK. In October 2008, the Parliamentary Outreach Manager appeared before the Committee to give an update on progress of this new initiative. We were pleased to note that the parliamentary outreach team, which is bicameral, works closely with the House of Lords Head of Outreach.

Parliamentary Education Centre

36. In October 2007, the House agreed the Committee's report on *Improving Facilities for Educational Visitors to Parliament* (HL Paper 177, Session 2006–07),¹¹ which concluded that “a dedicated space for school visitors of approximately 1,000 square metres (consisting of flexible accommodation of five classrooms with ancillary space for storage, toilet facilities, a lunch area and locker space) should be sought either on or off the existing Estate—the exact space depending on what becomes available and at what cost”. Following that decision, a detailed feasibility study was undertaken to identify a suitable location and examine how it could be adapted to meet the agreed requirements.
37. In May 2008, we considered the results of that feasibility study and approved plans for a new Parliamentary Education Centre, which should open in the Commons area of the Estate in 2012. The Centre will transform the facilities for education visitors to Parliament by providing a high quality professional space dedicated to learning. The increase in space will enable the Education Service to offer sessions for 100, 000 visitors per year, compared to the 29, 000 currently accommodated. The Centre will include video conferencing facilities and a space where art, archives and artefacts can be displayed. The Committee warmly welcomes the development of a Parliamentary Education Centre.

¹⁰ <http://www.parliament.uk/about/visiting/virtualtours.cfm>

¹¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldinformation.html>

CHAPTER 7: BROADCASTING OF PROCEEDINGS

38. The Information Committee supervises the arrangements for televising and sound broadcasting the proceedings of the House and its committees. The Director of Parliamentary Broadcasting, who works for both Houses, monitors adherence to the rules of coverage laid down by the Committee.

BBC Parliament during the Olympics

39. The Committee approved the BBC's plan to remove BBC Parliament temporarily from the freeview platform for the period of the Olympic Games only, which fell within the summer recess. The service would have been restored if Parliament had been recalled. BBC Parliament highlights service continued to be transmitted on satellite, cable and online during this period as normal.

Embedding

40. Many broadcasters, MPs and Peers would like users to be able to 'embed' Parliamentary material into their own web sites. Under the terms of the current licences, the Parliamentary Broadcasting Unit Limited (PARBUL) cannot allow any of its licensees to offer embedding. However, embedding could allow wider access to parliamentary proceedings through websites and other channels, and the Committee supports measures which would increase coverage, and thereby understanding, of Parliament. Whilst there would be risks in allowing embedding, given those benefits, the Committee would like to see further examination of how this might be achieved.
41. We have therefore asked the Director of Parliamentary Broadcasting to undertake further research on the opportunities and risks of allowing end user embedding of footage of parliamentary proceedings and to report back to the Committee.

Placing parliamentary footage on searchable websites

42. A number of MPs have suggested that they should be allowed to place clips of their appearances in the Commons Chamber on video-sharing websites such as YouTube. Although, the issue was raised first in the Commons, we recognise that there may be a similar interest in the House of Lords. Also, as the PARBUL agreement is bicameral, any changes affecting the licence should be agreed by both Houses.
43. The Committee asked the Director of Parliamentary Broadcasting to undertake research and negotiations with PARBUL and report back to the Committee. The Committee subsequently recommended to the Clerk of the Parliaments that he should approve an approach to PARBUL to vary the terms and conditions of the sub-licence variation to Peers so as to allow Peers to post coverage of their parliamentary contributions on external searchable web sites. The Committee also agreed certain conditions for such posting. The Committee has asked for advice and technical support to be provided so that all Members who wish to can upload parliamentary footage onto searchable websites.

CHAPTER 8: THE PARLIAMENTARY ARCHIVES

44. The Parliamentary Archives is a bicameral service based in the House of Lords.

Exhibitions

45. The Committee monitored preparations for the exhibition to mark the 50th anniversary of the Life Peerages Act 1958 and received regular updates.
46. The Committee also approved the proposed outline of a phased project—provisionally entitled *People and Parliament: connecting with communities*, which will seek to engage the public with the work of Parliament. It will demonstrate the role that individuals and communities have played in the development of Parliament and its activities during the last 200 years and will draw heavily on archival materials. Running from 2009 to 2012, it will represent a contribution by Parliament towards the cultural Olympiad. Moreover, it will showcase the holdings of the Parliamentary Archives and develop a sustainable web-based learning resource based on archival materials. The programme will begin in 2009 with the Archives and the Parliamentary Outreach team working closely with Norfolk Record Office.
47. The Committee was pleased to note the loan of four iconic Parliamentary records—the Petition of Right (1628), the Death Warrant of Charles I (1649), the Bill of Rights (1689) and the Great Reform Act (1832)—to the exhibition *Taking Liberties*, which is taking place in the British Library from October 2008 to March 2009.

Future developments

48. Members of the Committee attended a business planning meeting of the Archives in July 2008 and expressed keen interest in the wide range of information management activities which the Archives undertakes to support Parliament's aims and objectives. As a result, at future meetings, the Committee will receive updates from the Archives on its other functions, including records management, Freedom of Information and Data Protection, managing information risk, and digital preservation.