



REPORT

74th Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK
(CPA UK)

Westminster, United Kingdom

9 – 13 March 2026

PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION

The delegation to the 74th Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments comprised:



Senator Melanie Roberts-Radgman



Senator Dr. Marlene Attzs



Assistant Clerk Ms. Lorraine Berahzer

The delegation departed Trinidad and Tobago on March 08, 2026 and arrived in London on March 09, 2026. The delegation departed London on March 14, 2026.



INTRODUCTION

THE 74TH WESTMINSTER SEMINAR on Effective Parliaments was held from 9 to 13 March 2026 at the Houses of Parliament, Westminster, London. The Seminar is an annual event hosted by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK (CPA UK) and is one of the flagship capacity-building programmes for parliamentarians and parliamentary officials from across the Commonwealth.

The Seminar enhanced delegates' capacity to scrutinise, represent and exercise oversight more effectively within their respective legislatures.

The specific outputs were:

- Output One: Strengthened professional networks across Commonwealth legislatures, enabling sustained collaboration.
- Output Two: Enhanced leadership, administrative, and scrutiny tools for parliamentary practice.
- Output Three: Deepened understanding of effective parliamentary systems through comparative analysis.

The programme covered a wide range of topics including the role of presiding officers, parliamentary scrutiny, accountability, diversity and inclusion, artificial intelligence, and member safety. The Seminar coincided with Commonwealth Day, providing additional ceremonial and diplomatic activities.

DAY 1: MONDAY, 9 MARCH 2026

CELEBRATING THE COMMONWEALTH



PHOTO: Commonwealth Day Flag Raising Ceremony



(From left) Delegates as well as representatives from across the Commonwealth witnessed the raising of the Commonwealth flag. Remarks were delivered by the Speaker of the House of Commons, Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP.

COMMONWEALTH DAY FLAG RAISING CEREMONY

Prior to the formal opening of the Seminar, delegates attended the Commonwealth Day Flag Raising Ceremony at New Palace Yard, Palace of Westminster. This year's theme – Unlocking Opportunities Together for a Prosperous Commonwealth – highlighted the Secretary General's commitment to facilitate the development of transformative, equitable and high-impact opportunities across the Commonwealth.

OPENING ADDRESS AND KEYNOTE

THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES TOGETHER FOR A PROSPEROUS COMMONWEALTH

The Seminar was formally opened by Sarah Dickson OBE, Chief Executive of CPA UK. The opening address, which coincided with Commonwealth Day and International Women's Day, was delivered by the Right Honourable the Baroness Scotland of Asthal KC, Member of the House of Lords, UK Parliament. The session was held in the Attlee Suite, Portcullis House.

Baroness Scotland spoke about collective action and its measurable impact, citing her experience addressing domestic violence against women and girls in Spain, where joint efforts reduced incidents by 64 per cent. She observed that five regions of the Commonwealth were represented in the room, and that it was precisely this combination of peoples that makes the Commonwealth special. She reminded delegates that each member has one vote and each person has a value. The Commonwealth represents every region, every race, and every culture.

Baroness Scotland acknowledged that democratic principles are under challenge, and that being a Member of Parliament is sometimes a thankless and burdensome task. She thanked all members present for their service. She noted that the Commonwealth offers something special in intra-Commonwealth trade, in the strengthening of peoples, and in enduring cooperation – including the commitment to democracy and justice. She referenced the Commonwealth Finance Access Hub as a practical example.





Baroness Scotland declared that Parliament is the heart of the Commonwealth, and that democracy is not static – it must evolve. Global transformation is accelerating, and access and opportunity must be shared. She cited climate change and economic shocks as areas requiring collective attention.

During the question and answer session, Senator Melanie Roberts-Radgman spoke on the importance of engaging youth and bringing them together. Baroness Scotland referenced the Commonwealth Youth Council and the awards it offers, encouraging members to reach out to young people, host events, and take advantage of the training resources available through the Commonwealth – including training on artificial intelligence.

Baroness Scotland closed by remarking that it takes courage and fortitude to speak the truth when it is easier to remain silent.

COMMONWEALTH DAY SERVICE OF CELEBRATION, WESTMINSTER ABBEY

The afternoon of Day 1 was dedicated to the Commonwealth Day Service of Celebration at Westminster Abbey, attended by the Royal Family and dignitaries from across the Commonwealth. The service brought together representatives from the 33 legislatures in attendance at the Seminar, as well as members of the Diplomatic community, in a ceremony marking the significance of the Commonwealth's shared values and common purpose.



PHOTO: Commonwealth Day Service, Westminster Abbey

DAY 2: TUESDAY, 10 MARCH 2026

PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEMS

TOUR OF THE UK PARLIAMENT

Delegates were given a guided tour of the UK Parliament and introduced to some of its work, art and history. A group photograph was taken on the stairs of Westminster Hall.

SESSION 1

PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEMS ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

This session took the form of a comparative exchange among delegates, examining the parliamentary systems of different territories. The delegation's comparators were the Isle of Man and Guernsey, with Trinidad and Tobago also contributing its experience.



ISLE OF MAN

The Isle of Man operates a tricameral parliament. When the upper and lower houses convene jointly, they form Tynwald – widely regarded as the oldest continuous parliament in the world. The upper house is elected by the lower house, while the lower house is elected by popular vote. Religion plays a role in the proceedings of parliament, and the Isle of Man is notably advanced in its digital research and digital platforms. The Clerk plays a particularly important role in this regard.

On the process for election to the upper house, delegates heard that candidates complete an application, participate in a speed-dating style process lasting over two hours, and then proceed to a televised interview. This process prompted reflection on the value of having members engage more comfortably with the public.

GUERNSEY

In Guernsey, all members of the States of Deliberation sit as independents – there is no party system. An attempt to introduce party politics was made but was not successful. Because every member is independent, every member wishes to be heard, and sittings can run on for considerable periods. Any two members may put forward an amendment, and it must be debated. Guernsey also operates an island-wide voting system, whereby the electorate does not vote by district. Sittings are not televised, though they are broadcast on radio. The Speaker is appointed by the court, raising questions about the separation of powers.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Trinidad and Tobago shared its experience with respect to party politics and the workings of Parliament, including the structure of the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the Constitution. A noted weakness is that elections are heavily aligned to party affiliation; a corresponding strength is that the party system may provide voters with a clear indication of the direction in which they wish to vote.

KEY POINTS FROM THE FEEDBACK SESSION

- Voter turnout may be influenced by socioeconomic and sociodemographic factors, which in turn shape electoral outcomes.
- Members face threats from the public, and the level of security available to them varies considerably across jurisdictions.
- Some parliaments have reserved seats for women and former service members.
- Some parliaments draw strength from robust committee systems and petition debates.
- Party loyalty versus the national interest is a tension present in various systems.
- Some parliaments have built-in consultation models for bills, including processes for public consultation and the hearing of expert witnesses.
- The question of gender quotas was raised, with some parliaments advocating for a set number of seats to ensure demographic representation.



SESSION 2

THE ROLE OF THE SPEAKER

This session took the form of a comparative exchange among delegates, examining the parliamentary systems of different territories. The delegation's comparators were the Isle of Man and Guernsey, with Trinidad and Tobago also contributing its experience.

Speaker: Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP,
Speaker of the House of Commons

The Speaker explained that he holds two distinct roles: he remains a Member of Parliament with responsibility to represent his constituency, and he serves as Speaker. In the latter capacity, he chairs the House of Commons Commission, which effectively runs Parliament. He spoke with particular pride about the work done on mental health support for all those connected to Parliament, noting that nurses are now on staff and doctors available on call.

His advice to any Member was straightforward: make an impression. He encouraged members to get up and speak, put in a question, table a motion – to act.



PHOTO: Session with Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle

He believes each Member should have a substantial project they are passionate about and should follow through on it. He also encouraged Members to be grounded in their constituencies – to be present, to engage, and to find out what is actually happening on the ground.

On the challenges of the chamber, the Speaker observed that PMQs are the centrepiece of parliamentary scrutiny. His role is to let proceedings develop while ensuring that things do not spill over. He maintains a rota on a percentage basis so that Members feel the process is conducted equitably.

On building relationships across parliaments, the Speaker said plainly: we are one family, and we should not operate in silos. He called on the Commonwealth to function as a trading bloc, with education and wealth exchanged among members.

SESSION 3

PRIVILEGES, STANDARDS AND BEHAVIOUR IN PARLIAMENT

This session took the form of a comparative exchange among delegates, examining the parliamentary systems of different territories. The delegation's comparators were the Isle of Man and Guernsey, with Trinidad and Tobago also contributing its experience.

Speakers: Daniel Greenberg CB, Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards; Mr Gary Clueit MLC, Member of Tynwald, Isle of Man.

Daniel Greenberg opened with a direct observation: standards are not optional. Without standards, what do we have? He noted that young people are increasingly disengaging from parliaments, and emphasised that we govern by consent – and that consent must be grounded in trust. He argued that the system must be founded on clear and articulated principles, referencing the Nolan Principles as the framework applied in the United Kingdom. He urged delegates not to be afraid of scandals – institutions must react positively and address misconduct directly.

Mr Gary Clueit MLC addressed the challenges confronting a parliamentary standards committee, citing the structural advantage of built-in continuity: membership of such a committee is for a defined period, ensuring that institutional memory is preserved. He noted that the approach to investigations has evolved – it is no longer an inquisition but a fact-finding mission.



KEY POINTS FROM THE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION



- Parliamentary language must reflect mutual respect. Members should not conduct themselves as though they have contempt for one another.
- Social media can be a powerful tool for public engagement if harnessed positively.
- Parliamentary privilege does not extend to the use of abusive language.
- Members are encouraged to use social media to demonstrate leadership and to engage constructively.
- Perceived conflicts of interest must be taken very seriously – members in such a situation should recuse themselves.
- A member's personal life should not generally form part of a committee investigation; however, criminal behaviour is not a personal matter.
- Conventions are being eroded. The response should be to incentivise good conduct and publicise it openly.





DAY 3: WEDNESDAY, 11 MARCH 2026

SCRUTINY IN PRACTICE

SESSION 4

HOLDING THE EXECUTIVE TO ACCOUNT

Alberto Costa MP – Parliamentary Privilege and Standards

Alberto Costa MP spoke on parliamentary privilege. His central argument was that members must be able to speak and act without fear or favour – but they must also tell the truth. He drew on the example of the conduct surrounding the former Prime Minister Boris Johnson to illustrate that no one is above the law and that all are accountable. He addressed the areas of sexual harassment, conflicts of interest, bullying, and corruption, noting that Parliament must be regarded as a workforce like any other. The Standards Committee consists of seven Members of Parliament and seven lay members, with the chair holding no casting vote.

Christopher Kang'ombe MP – National Assembly of Zambia

The panellist from Zambia addressed the constitutional mandate of Parliament and budget analysis. The committee responsible for budget scrutiny invites experts to provide evidence during an analysis process that runs for ten days following the budget reading. Christopher also spoke on the Committee on Government Assurances, which reviews commitments made by the government that have not been followed through, examining projects and their implementation over a six-month period.

It was noted that certain committees must not be chaired by government members – for example, the Public Accounts Committee, which scrutinises audit reports.

KEY POINTS FROM THE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

- The Liaison Committee is a select committee composed of the chairs of all other select committees; it holds public sessions with the Prime Minister three times per year.
- There is an independent recruiter who selects lay members of the Committee on Standards, and the House of Commons must approve those appointments.
- Parliaments are encouraged to appoint a trusted person to report on best workplace practice and to commission an independent report.
- An independent panel should be in place to hear appeals, and the benchmarks established must be fundamental and non-negotiable.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

An introduction to the history, procedures, and conventions of Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) was provided by a Senior Clerk of the House of Commons. Delegates who held tickets were escorted to the Public Gallery in the Chamber to watch proceedings in person; those without tickets watched a live broadcast in the Attlee Suite, accompanied by a running commentary.

PMQs takes place on Wednesdays and is widely regarded as the highlight of the parliamentary week. Questions are selected via a ballot, and the Leader of the Opposition is entitled to ask six questions. The Speaker has latitude to extend question time in order to ensure that all Members whose names were submitted in the ballot receive an opportunity.



SESSION 5A

USING PARLIAMENTARY RESOURCES EFFECTIVELY FOR SCRUTINY

Chair: Dame Meg Hillier MP | Speakers: Layla Moran MP, Ms Sehar Kamran MNA, Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town

This session explored how parliamentarians can make the most of the resources available to them within their local contexts. It covered practical strategies for accessing and managing parliamentary tools such as research services, procedural advice, committee support, and external expertise.

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town provided insight into the functioning of committees in the UK Parliament, particularly within the House of Lords. She explained that, unlike Members of the House of Commons who represent specific geographic constituencies, members of the House of Lords tend to focus on national and cross-cutting policy issues. Reports produced are typically short – often limited to approximately a dozen paragraphs – and usually contain one or two clear recommendations. An important feature of the UK system is that the Government is required to respond formally to committee reports within a defined period, normally three months.

The session underscored that effective scrutiny does not depend solely on the size of a parliament, but on the strategic use of available resources, strong committee support structures, and clear procedures that require the Executive to respond to parliamentary findings.



SESSION 5B

CLERKS AND OFFICIALS – EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF TIME AND RESOURCES

Speaker: James Whittle, Chief of Staff, House of Lords, UK Parliament

James Whittle addressed practical approaches to the management of time and resources in a parliamentary setting. He opened with the observation that there is never enough time, people, or resources. The value, the purpose, and the objective must always be kept clearly in view.

Key points raised included the importance of learning to delegate and equipping one's team, asking what good looks like, and approaching digital tools for efficiency with care – the question must be asked whether such tools replace work or generate new problems.

A breakout exercise was conducted examining staff wellbeing as a key component of efficiency and team resilience – specifically, what practices or policies have been found effective in maintaining resilience and preventing burnout.

SESSION 6A

MEMBERS – LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS

Facilitator: Ms Ginny Radmall, Director, The Ivy Way

This session explored practical techniques to help parliamentarians communicate more effectively in the Chamber, in committees, and in public engagements. Participants were encouraged to develop their own communication style, and to present arguments in a way that is both persuasive and relatable. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of telling one's story in one's own way, drawing on personal conviction and experience to enhance credibility and impact.

The facilitator also discussed how body language can amplify leadership presence – posture, eye contact, tone of voice, and controlled movement. Practical techniques for overcoming nervousness were shared, including thorough preparation, controlling breathing and pacing, and focusing on the message rather than on self-consciousness.

SESSION 6B

CLERKS AND OFFICIALS – LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR PARLIAMENTARY OFFICIALS

Facilitator: Kate Faragher, Founder and CEO, BeSpoke Skills

Kate Faragher re-titled this session 'Standing in Authority – How to Pull Clarity and Institutional Authority in Political Systems'. The session explored the most common sources of challenge in parliamentary work environments, including lack of resources, unclear roles and responsibilities, the difficulty of offering expert opinion to members when it involves correcting them, and the challenge of managing the boundary between politics and administration.

A strategic framework – the Coherence Model – was introduced, illustrating how three elements must align for a parliamentary professional to operate effectively: the Environment (political pressure, hierarchy, culture); the Role (authority, remit, boundaries); and Conversations (requests, conflict, negotiation). A central message was: when something fails, it is often a failure of clarity. The 'Nicely No' communication strategy was presented: staff should avoid personal refusals and instead pivot to institutional requirements, using formulations such as 'The committee has agreed that...' or 'The usual process is...'



Workshop: Design Your Charter of Service

Delegates were invited to design a 'Standards of Service' for their own parliament, considering: what three expectations Members must understand; the appropriate tone; where Members would see the Charter; and how it would be ensured that they absorbed it.

LAUNCH OF CPA UK STRATEGY – EVENING RECEPTION

Day 3 concluded with an evening reception, by kind permission of Mr Speaker, to mark the launch of the new CPA UK Strategy. The reception was held in the State Rooms, Speaker's House, at the invitation of the Right Honourable Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP. Remarks were delivered by Nusrat Ghani MP, Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Ways and Means, as well as the Right Honourable David Mundell MP, Treasurer of CPA UK, and the Right Honourable the Baroness Chapman of Darlington, Minister of State for International Development and Africa.



PHOTO: Evening Reception – Speaker's House



PHOTO: Evening Reception – Speaker's House

DAY 4: THURSDAY, 12 MARCH 2026

PARLIAMENTS IN AN EVOLVING WORLD

SESSION 7

PARLIAMENTARY WORK THROUGH A DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY AND GENDER-SENSITIVE LENS

Chair: Helen Haywood, Deputy Chief Executive, CPA UK

Ms Sibeso K. Sefulo MP – National Assembly of Zambia

MP Sefulo underlined the importance of ensuring inclusivity within parliamentary institutions, citing the finding that 68 per cent of respondents regarded diversity as useful, and making the broader argument that diversity produces better policy outcomes. Female representation in her jurisdiction stood at 15 per cent in the national parliament and 7.6 per cent at the local government level.

Legislation has been enacted introducing a quota system, with 20 seats reserved for women, 15 for youth, and 5 for persons with disabilities. The Zambian Parliamentary Women's Caucus was established to ensure that all female parliamentarians meet, are heard, and are supported.



Mr Terence Kernaghan – Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Mr Kernaghan spoke under the theme of 'walk in someone else's shoes', addressing the realities of discrimination and exclusion faced by marginalised groups. Key points included: the Pay Equity Act and the need to make equal pay a reality; the need to produce disaggregated data to enable targeted policy interventions; the historic election of the first female Speaker in his jurisdiction; and the importance of inclusive language in the Chamber. He noted that in Quebec, 42 per cent of parliamentarians are female, and that a three-weeks-on, one-week-off sitting pattern facilitates the participation of Members with young families.

Jarvis Matiya – Deputy Secretary General, CPA HQ

Mr Matiya highlighted that the CPA's strategic plan includes gender equality and strengthening access programmes as core commitments. A Network of Parliamentarians within the Commonwealth is being developed to examine disability inclusion. The year 2026 has been designated as a campaign year on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. A capital investment fund is under consideration to assist parliaments that wish to make structural changes to improve accessibility.

KEY POINTS FROM THE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

- Trinidad and Tobago: The constitutional and policy framework should mainstream these issues – for example, addressing period poverty as part of a broader gender-sensitive policy agenda.
- A recurring theme was that gender is fundamentally a development issue and must be viewed through a budgetary lens.
- Age barriers are also an issue – what opportunities are made available to young people?
- A gender caucus operating as a committee provides a structural mechanism for embedding gender perspectives into parliamentary work.
- Ministerial appointments to boards offer a practical opportunity to champion diversity.



SESSION 8

SAFETY OF PARLIAMENTARIANS AND THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

Hon. Chamindranee Kiriella – Parliament of Sri Lanka

Hon. Kiriella spoke on the threats to democratic institutions, noting that they are real and increasing. She emphasised that Parliament must no longer be treated as a low-risk environment. Key points included: the need for multi-pronged approaches to security including briefings, cyber security protocols, and panic alarms; the requirement for clear laws against the intimidation of Members; and the importance of applying a gender lens to security considerations, particularly for female Members.

Muhammad Hassaan Riaz MPA – Provincial Assembly of Punjab, Pakistan

Mr Riaz spoke on the challenges of public frustration and social media threats. Members are expected by constituents to address every problem, regardless of whether it falls within their parliamentary remit. He noted that response mechanisms are too slow and that parameters for responding to threats need to be updated. The Parliamentary Privileges Committee was identified as playing a strong role in protecting Members.

Oliver Davis – Deputy Director of Member Security, UK Parliament

Mr Davis noted that the Parliamentary Estate was directly attacked in 2017 and outlined the extensive security arrangements now in place. He noted that a one-size-fits-all approach to security is not appropriate – provision must be fair and consistent but also tailored to individual needs and risk profiles. Cyber security tools are available and should be utilised. Security for constituency offices and events outside Westminster remains a particular challenge.

KEY POINTS FROM THE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

- Members must not publish personal information such as travel routines or regular patterns of movement.
- Intelligence briefings should be made available to Members where appropriate.
- A CPA Framework on security for Member States should be developed.
- The session was intended, at a minimum, to get Members thinking about security as a parliamentary responsibility.



FORMAL LUNCH WITH KEYNOTE ADDRESS THE CHOLMONDELEY ROOM, HOUSE OF LORDS

Speaker: Hon. Shirley Botchwey, 7th Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

The Secretary-General's address emphasised the pivotal role of parliaments in translating high-level Commonwealth diplomacy into democratic dividends for its 2.7 billion citizens. She proposed four practical pillars for parliamentary integration: systematic participation in Commonwealth election observation missions; enhanced inclusion of parliamentarians in national delegations to international gatherings; strengthened alignment between diplomatic milestones and parliamentary committee processes; and cross-border sharing of legislative innovations.

The address framed the Commonwealth not merely as an organisation of governments, but as a 'living network' where independent, capable parliaments act as the primary engines for achieving shared prosperity and protecting the rules-based international order.



PHOTO: Formal Lunch – Cholmondeley Room, House of Lords

SESSION 8

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN PARLIAMENT

Chair: Sarah Dickson OBE, Chief Executive, CPA UK

Mark Egan – Media Consultant and AI Expert

- Data accuracy has improved significantly, which is precisely what makes AI both powerful and concerning.
- AI capability is approximately doubling every seven months.
- Deep fake technology is advancing rapidly and poses a direct challenge to parliamentary communications.
- Technology changes; ethics do not. The ethical framework must remain constant even as the tools evolve.
- Workflows and data quality must be in good order before AI tools are deployed.

Ben Woodhams – Head of Digital Procedural Services, House of Lords

- AI can be used as a tool for evidence review – for example, AI can process and review written submissions from calls for evidence.
- AI systems can be trained on historical Hansard records to improve performance over time.
- Parliaments are encouraged to develop their own algorithms tailored to their specific needs.

James Pinnell – Deputy Head of Programmes, CPA HQ

- Parliaments' use of AI has tripled in recent years.
- AI-generated videos are increasingly convincing and difficult to distinguish from genuine content.
- Brazil is noted as a leader in the use of AI for minority language support, with advanced translation systems already in use.
- Digital poverty is a real concern – there is a risk that those without reliable internet access or digital literacy will be disenfranchised.
- Parliaments should consider watermarking their digital assets as a form of provenance protection.
- Parliaments should avoid adopting 'shiny' tools unless there is a genuine use case and the capacity to make the most of them.

DAY 5: FRIDAY, 13 2026

MEMBERS' OUTREACH / CLERKS: PROCEDURE IN PRACTICE

Day 5 operated on a split programme. Members of Parliament were divided into small groups for constituency outreach visits across the United Kingdom. Senator Melanie Roberts-Radgman and Senator Dr. Marlene Attzs participated in the Members' outreach programme. Ms Lorraine Berahzer, as a Clerk and Official, remained in Westminster for a dedicated programme of visits and sessions.



MEMBERS – OUTREACH IN PRACTICE

Parliamentarians visited UK constituencies and met with the relevant Members of Parliament and local stakeholders. A bespoke itinerary was provided for each constituency. The assigned visit for the Trinidad and Tobago parliamentarians was:

Bambos Charalambous MP, Southgate and Wood Green Constituency

CLERKS AND OFFICIALS – PROCEDURE IN PRACTICE

The programme for Clerks and Officials commenced with a visit to the Parliamentary Education Centre, followed by a visit to the House of Commons Library. Session 10 was then held in the CPA Room, Palace of Westminster, before a closing feedback session.

SESSION 10

BUILDING RESPECTFUL WORKING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARLIAMENTARIANS AND PARLIAMENTARY OFFICIALS

Ms Mills addressed strategies and methods for Clerks and Officials to develop good working relationships with Members. Key points included:

- Name references, titles, and professional boundaries must be clearly established and consistently observed.
- A behaviour code with attendant sanctions must be in place to set the parameters of acceptable conduct.
- Documents setting out the services provided by parliamentary staff should be clearly articulated.
- Different modes of communication serve different purposes, and the choice of medium matters.
- Whips can assist in resolving issues where they arise between Members and staff.

Speaker: Kenneth Fox, Clerk, Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons, UK Parliament

Mr Fox addressed the question of neutrality, emphasising that parliamentary staff must be seen to have no political affiliation – even where they may personally disagree with a particular position. The message to Members must be consistent regardless of party. He also noted the importance of never saying no without offering an alternative, and of line managers being prepared to stand up for their staff.



PHOTO: Session 10 — Clerks and Officials

VISIT TO THE JUDICIAL COMMITTEE OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL, SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

Clerks and Officials also visited the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council at the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, gaining an understanding of the judicial dimension of the Westminster system.

CONCLUSION

The 74th Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments provided the Trinidad and Tobago delegation with practical, comparative insights into the functioning of modern legislatures across the Commonwealth. Several key takeaways emerge for strengthening parliamentary effectiveness in Trinidad and Tobago:

1. Committees as Engines of Accountability

The Seminar reinforced that effective scrutiny is driven by strong committee systems, supported by clear procedures, expert input, and timely Government responses.

2. Standards, Trust, and Public Confidence

A recurring theme was that parliamentary legitimacy depends on maintaining high standards of conduct, transparency, and accountability. Where breaches occur, institutions must respond decisively and credibly.

3. Strategic Use of Parliamentary Resources

Effective parliaments maximise limited resources through strong committee support, research services, and clear reporting structures – often prioritising concise reports with actionable recommendations and defined response timelines.

4. The Importance of Networks and Collaboration

Engagement across Commonwealth legislatures enhances knowledge-sharing, policy innovation, and institutional strengthening. The relationships developed through this Seminar provide a valuable platform for continued collaboration.

5. Emerging Challenges: Technology, Safety, Security, and Inclusion

Issues such as artificial intelligence, digital communication, member safety, security, and inclusivity are increasingly central to parliamentary work and require structured policy responses.

KEY IMPLICATION FOR TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The Seminar underscored that parliamentary effectiveness is not determined by size or resources, but by clarity of process, strength of institutions, and consistency of standards.

The experience reinforced many of the principles and practices already applied in Trinidad and Tobago while offering insight into areas where further development may be beneficial.

RECOMMENDED WAY FORWARD

The delegation recommends that consideration be given to:

- Strengthening committee procedures and reporting frameworks
- Enhancing mechanisms for enforcing standards and addressing breaches
- Expanding access to research and analytical support for Members
- Promoting structured engagement with Commonwealth parliamentary networks
- Reviewing emerging areas such as AI, security, and inclusivity within the parliamentary context

The delegation expresses its gratitude to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK (CPA UK) for the organisation and facilitation of the Seminar, and to the many speakers, officials, and colleagues from across the Commonwealth who contributed to a rich and rewarding week.



© 2026 Office of the Parliament. All rights reserved