

DEMOS

DEMOCRACY ON DEFAULT SETTINGS

HOW OUTDATED SYSTEMS
UNDERMINE THE DAY-TO-DAY
WORK OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Parliament Workflow Study is a research group inspired by the question “How is technology changing the work of politics?” The project focuses on understanding the day-to-day activities of the offices of Members of Parliament, with the aim of improving the way that MPs run their offices, and thereby contribute to a flourishing democracy in the UK.

The Parliament Workflow Study includes:

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The Parliament Workflow Study is convened by Campaign Lab and Newspeak House.

Campaign Lab is a network of politically-minded progressive data scientists, researchers and technologists dedicated to researching, inventing, and testing innovative tools to reimagine civic engagement practices, meeting challenges such as declining voter turnout and the erosion of trust in institutions.

Newspeak House, The London College of Political Technology, is an independent college founded in 2015 with the mission to study, nurture and inspire emerging communities of practice across civil society and the public sector in the UK.

We are grateful to the MPs and parliamentary staff who generously gave their time and insights to the Parliamentary Workflow Study, and we thank them for the essential work they do to keep our democratic system functioning every day.

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Finally, thanks to Demos for publishing the paper and to Lucy Bush for her support with the final edit.

Hannah O’Rourke and Edward Saperia

FOREWORD

BY POLLY CURTIS



This report is the hidden story of the thousands of “staffers” who run the offices of the 650 members of parliament. They sit at the interface between citizens and the parliamentary system, and as such have a unique vantage point of the democratic moment we’re in. Their daily work is the lifeblood of democracy.

At Demos, we are focusing on this moment of democratic emergency, in which around the world we are seeing democratic backsliding electorate’s losing faith in the traditions of liberal democracy. In the UK this crisis of confidence is taking grip. Our mission is to upgrade democracy, to mend this broken relationship between state and citizen and build back trust. That mission is big and ambitious; but our methods are practical, bold and hopeful. We are working at the interface between state and citizen to identify the super practical ways to build back trust - through more participatory forms of everyday democracy, through more effective and human public services, by curtailing the excesses of markets, and by designing tech and media policy for democratic resilience.

By examining the work of MPs’ offices, Democracy on Default Settings - authored by the brilliant teams at Campaign Lab and Newspeak House - gets to the heart of how that democratic interface works.

It describes the daily frustrations of the lack of process, information sharing and experience in setting up and delivering an MPs office. After the huge influx of new MPs at the 2024 election this lack of shared understanding of what it took to establish these operations left many reinventing the wheel. I saw it on panicked new MPs’ faces in the summer after the election: while taking on the biggest and most important challenges of their lives, they were struggling to work out how to put in place highly technical systems, workflows and HR practices. They weren’t prepared for it.

This report is practical, bold and hopeful because it offers a clear path for upgrading the work of MPs offices that are not expensive, make the best use of the existing infrastructure, and could be implemented rapidly. The potential to accelerate how MPs offices function is real and could happen quickly, helping to repair the relationship between state and citizen.

This work sits alongside a Demos project looking at how to upgrade the work of MPs by building better ways for them to engage with their constituents beyond the usual suspects. Our work designing MP/Citizen Conversations is building a model for engaging harder to reach voters, and helping MPs to represent even better. That work noticed the daily grit in the MP office “machine”, as our authors here describe it. So we’re delighted to be working with Campaign Lab and Newspeak House to platform this important research here.

Sometimes the work of improving democratic systems is about changing constitutions and conventions, shifting government delivery, or taking on huge policy challenges; sometimes it’s about helping an MP do their job better by simply upgrading their IT and HR systems - and that’s eminently fixable. We hope to work with MPs, their offices, the parliamentary authorities and the parties to support the implementation of the recommendations of this work.

Polly Curtis
CEO, Demos

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every UK MP is supported by a small office team handling a wide range of responsibilities, from constituent casework and policy research to media management and public engagement. These offices are not run by Parliament, but by MPs themselves: 650 effectively independent micro-organisations that shape how democracy is delivered on the ground. For many citizens, their MP is the primary point of contact when encountering problems they attribute to the state.

The total cost to the public of all 650 offices is on the order of £200m per year. This is a major national infrastructure project, and a unique direct investment in the UK's democratic function that we cannot let go to waste.

Meanwhile, technological progress has transformed many areas of public life. To what extent has this change reached MPs' offices? Have they been able to adopt modern working practices? And how much does this vary between one office and another?

Despite the central role MPs' offices play in the democratic system, they remain under-researched. Since Doteveryone's [Making MPs More Digital](#) in 2018, there has been little public analysis of how these offices function or the challenges they face today.

This report seeks to fill that gap. Based on in-depth fieldwork in 2023–24 involving extended interviews and surveys with staffers and MPs, it examines how MPs' offices are structured, how they operate in practice, and to what extent they are leveraging technology to support and improve their work.

Our research revealed a wide range of challenges in how MPs' offices operate, some technical, others structural or cultural. Yet these difficulties sit alongside clear opportunities for improvement. Many of the problems we observed could be tackled through straightforward interventions: clearer onboarding processes, stronger peer networks, better knowledge-sharing, and more effective use of digital tools.

Office staff consistently demonstrated heroic resourcefulness and dedication, often going above and beyond to get things done within the systems they find themselves in. But without access to specialist technical expertise or a professional environment that encourages innovation, their capacity to improve their situation was often limited.

Following this research and ahead of the 2024 new intake, we produced a comprehensive onboarding manual for MPs, available via the W4MP website. This report builds on that work with clear and practical recommendations for stakeholders across the ecosystem: Parliament, political parties, IPSA, MPs, and office managers.

There is no single fix, but many practical improvements are possible, and very few are costly or require new legislation. If we want a stronger, more responsive democracy, we cannot neglect the behind-the-scenes systems that support it. This report is a step toward understanding where those systems are working and where they urgently need reform, but there is much more to be done, and we warmly invite others to help carry this work forward.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Lack of strategic direction:** There's fundamental uncertainty about the evolving role of MPs, which expresses itself as a lack of clear objectives for offices. 46% of staffers reported a lack of well-defined targets or goals in their work.
- 2. Lack of practical leadership support:** MPs are not just legislators; they are employers, managers, team leaders, and strategists. Their approach to leadership has a profound impact on office culture, staff wellbeing, and service delivery. Yet they are given no training or support in how to build and manage a functioning team.
- 3. Lack of onboarding materials:** A significant gap exists in onboarding support for new staffers, with 73% of surveyed staff reporting no access to written guidance, handbooks, or operational instructions.
- 4. Lack of consistency between offices:** Parliamentary offices lack a standardised organisational model for an office, resulting in widely varying team structures. In 2022-2023, 89 different job titles were created across MPs' offices. This hampers capacity building and peer learning for roles between offices.
- 5. High workloads and low process clarity:** MPs' offices are high-pressure environments with few standardised workflows. Staff often operate without clear systems for managing, prioritising, or distributing work, contributing to inefficiencies and serious concerns around wellbeing.
- 6. Underutilised staffing budgets:** Historical concerns about expense scandals have led to cautious staffing budget management. With 68% of MPs retaining over £20,000 in unused staffing budgets (2022-2023), offices often rely on temporary interns and placement schemes, limiting their operational capacity.
- 7. Inconsistent use of technology:** While some offices do explore a variety of digital tools, there's little shared practice office to office, and options are constrained by lack of investment in cybersecurity. Since 2019, MPs have purchased over 275 different software tools, including, for example, 34 different types of video editing software.
- 8. Lack of diversity of skills and experience:** Informal recruitment practices favor those with existing parliamentary connections as 59% of staff had previous MP office experience. Modern recruitment techniques and technology are underutilised, further limiting the talent pool. There is a clear need to professionalise recruitment practices while improving equity and transparency.
- 9. Low pay:** Many staff are paid significantly below market rates for comparable roles in the civil service or third sector. Entry-level salaries commonly fall in the mid-£20,000s, compared with £30,000–£40,000 for roles with similar levels of responsibility elsewhere in the public and voluntary sectors. These starting salaries are far short of the demands and responsibilities of the job, contributing to high turnover, limited diversity, and difficulty attracting experienced professionals.

Opportunities for progression are minimal and turnover is high. Only 36.21% of MPs' staff who held passes employed in February 2020 were still in post in February 2024, indicating substantial turnover over the course of a single parliamentary term.

- 10. Insufficient training and feedback:** Staff development is largely informal, with limited training on either core systems or emerging digital tools. 30% of survey respondents say they receive no feedback on their performance, and many report navigating roles without clear support.
- 11. Widespread stress and burnout:** Staff report intense workloads, long hours, and blurred boundaries between personal and professional life. Many describe the job as "all-consuming," with wellbeing support inconsistent or absent.
- 12. Lack of peer learning:** Many MPs' offices operate in silos, with little visibility into what other teams are doing-or how to avoid repeating the same mistakes.
- 13. Poor knowledge management:** Information is poorly stored, shared, and retained across offices. Institutional memory is fragile, and data analytics is rare. Most offices lack the tools or time to reflect on trends or improve their systems over time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. PARLIAMENT

1.1 should offer support from independent recruitment specialists to sit in on interviews with prospective staffers, and advise offices on recruiting best practice.

1.2 should fund W4MP to revise mpofficemanual.uk every Parliament, with updated research on how workflows and processes across offices have evolved in the interim.

2. PARLIAMENT DIGITAL SERVICE (PDS)

2.1 should publish a pathway for requests for new software, with clear guidance and a transparent process around approvals, with clear guidance both for MPs and for prospective suppliers.

2.2 should provide procurement advice and support for MPs' offices seeking to buy software for specific use cases, including better information for offices on what tools are available and permitted. This should include negotiating bulk procurement and bespoke support for popular products, based both on sector trends, and demand and feedback from offices.

3. INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY (IPSA)

3.1 should review pay bands annually to match market rates for comparable job titles, building on their recent consultation on competency-based pay and progression.

3.2 should introduce mandatory independent exit interviews for departing staff to create a clearer picture of why people leave and where there may be systemic problems in workplace culture or management. This should be shared with the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme for review.

3.3 should provide and encourage offices to use up-to-date software packages for HR and recruitment. These systems should collect data on demographics and professional background which should be aggregated, anonymised, and made public.

4. POLITICAL PARTIES

4.1 should invest in ongoing professional support for offices to make the most of the technology available to them, especially Microsoft 365 suite. In addition to a helpdesk, this should include proactive support to review their systems in light of their strategic objectives.

4.2 should develop and invest in shared office infrastructure such as staffer learning networks and pooled party research services like Parliamentary Research Service or Policy Research Unit to improve cross-office learning and knowledge sharing.

5. MPS

5.1 should get quarterly leadership coaching or executive coaching. This should focus on helping them identify and set their strategic priorities.

6. OFFICE MANAGERS

6.1 should receive quarterly management coaching. This should focus on reviewing progress against priorities, and reflecting on their delivery management practice (building effective teams, systems, and working culture).

6.2 should commission operations consultants annually to help them identify opportunities for automation and capacity building.

6.3 should build capacity for data analysis and data analytics in their teams, either through training or hiring skilled staff.

QUICK WINS FOR MPS

These are not intended as a substitute for the more systemic changes in our recommendations, but are suggestions for pragmatic steps that offices can put in place today while the longer-term improvements are designed and implemented.

- 1. Share Your Priorities:** Take 10 minutes to talk your team through your top goals for the quarter or parliamentary session. A little clarity goes a long way in helping everyone focus their time and energy.
- 2. Use Your Full Budget:** Don't leave money on the table. Make full use of your staffing and office budgets - they exist to help you serve your constituents more effectively.
- 3. Level Up Your Casework:** Encourage your team to get disciplined about tagging casework properly. Then ask for regular analytics - what's coming in, what's taking time, what's improving.
- 4. Make Time to Think:** Block out space in your diary for strategic thinking. Even 30 minutes a week can help you step back from the noise and refocus on what matters most.
- 5. Say Thank You:** A simple thank you goes a long way. Let your staff know they're appreciated - especially after a tough week or a big milestone.
- 6. Ask Before You Buy Tech:** Before purchasing new software or tools, ask fellow MPs' offices what they're using and what's working. You'll save time, money, and frustration.
- 7. Document the Basics:** Make sure your team has up-to-date onboarding and handover notes. It saves hours when someone new joins or moves on.
- 8. Step Back and Observe:** Think of your office as a machine. Is it running smoothly? Where are the jams? Take time to observe how work flows and what could be improved.

INTRODUCTION

This report explores how MPs' offices are structured, resourced and supported, and the challenges that staff face as they try to meet the demands of their role. More than 3500 people work in these offices, carrying out the day-to-day work that keeps our democratic system functioning: supporting constituents, shaping policy, and keeping Parliament connected to the public.

Throughout our research, we were struck by the dedication and professionalism of constituency staff. Despite heavy workloads, limited resources, and unclear support structures, staff consistently described going above and beyond for constituents, driven by a strong sense of public service and responsibility. The challenges identified in this report do not reflect a lack of effort or commitment from staff, but rather the constraints of the systems within which they are working.

Yet because each office operates independently, there is surprisingly little infrastructure in place to support this work, whether from the political parties or from Parliament itself. Office systems, hiring practices and staff development vary widely, often shaped more by an individual MP's professional background than organisational standards one might expect in a mature sector.

One of the most striking findings of our research is that no part of the system - not MPs, not their staff, not Parliament - has a clear picture of what a truly high-performing office could look like. Fortunately, the challenge is not one of resistance, but of imagination and experience. Few MPs arrive with recent industry experience managing operational teams, and in the name of institutional neutrality, Parliament itself does little to actively shape how offices are run. The broader political culture also tends to underestimate what modern tools and practices are capable of.

This vacuum has left offices to figure things out on their own, with varying results. But it also presents a great opportunity: with the right input from civil society - drawing on established practices from service design and civic technology - the standard for what these offices can achieve could be dramatically raised. There is enormous untapped potential, and among a new generation of MPs and staffers, a growing appetite for change.

THE CONTEXT

Of the 650 MPs elected in the 2024 election, 335 MPs were new to Parliament. This is the largest intake of new MPs in modern history, surpassing the previous record of 327 MPs set in the 1945 general election, following a decade-long wartime election hiatus.

Setting up a new MP's office is a uniquely high-pressure task. Newly elected MPs and their staff are expected to hit the ground running, respond to urgent casework, hire a team, set up IT systems, and understand parliamentary processes - often with little to no formal guidance. Each office is effectively a small, self-managed organisation, yet most start without even a basic blueprint.

Setting up a new parliamentary office is a daunting task, fraught with challenges that can catch even the most experienced politicians off guard. Our research reveals that newly elected Members of Parliament often struggle to navigate the complex process of establishing a functional office while simultaneously managing the immediate demands of their role.

In some cases, new MPs may rely on campaign staff or an experienced office manager to help them navigate the initial setup process. However, when all team members are new to the role, even basic tasks like setting up IT systems or managing correspondence can pose significant challenges. As one interviewee recalled:

"I arrived to an empty building and a bare room, just a chair, table and telephone on the floor. I was told to furnish the office and was thinking - how? What with?"

While there are significant onboarding processes to parliamentary systems and formal House of Parliament processes, there is little guidance on how to run and set up an office in terms of workflows, staffing composition, operations and management.

Whilst often overlooked, MPs' offices are of crucial importance in our democratic system, in terms of being the primary point of contact for members of the public with their elected representative, as a primary port of call for problem solving and signposting constituents' issues and in preparing and furnishing the MP with the information and resources they need to undertake their role in Parliament effectively. Even modest improvements in MP office systems detailed in this section could directly impact on the responsiveness and effectiveness of the democratic system. MPs' offices are not peripheral administrative units; they are frontline democratic infrastructure through which millions of citizens experience the state.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach between late 2023 and mid-2024. It draws on 20 expert interviews, 10 in-depth interviews with current and former MP staffers, as well as 35 responses to a long-form survey, capturing a broad range of roles and office types. Participants included staff working in both constituency and Westminster offices, across all political parties, with former staffers often able to speak more candidly about structural challenges. Several contributors with years of experience working in offices provided ongoing input and context throughout the research process. Finally, there was an analysis of historical office expenditures from data published by IPSA.

FINDINGS

Members of Parliament are individual employers who staff and structure their offices much as any small business does. There is no single model for organising an MP's office, and recommendations, such as those from [Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority \(IPSA\)](#), are limited primarily to staffing budgets and roles. As a result, the organisation of MPs' offices varies widely.

Our findings highlight a complex and uneven landscape, characterised by significant variation in office setup, resource allocation, and staff management practices. Interviews with MPs' staff revealed a range of experiences: while some offices were praised for their cohesion, efficiency, and supportive working environments, others were marked by high turnover, confusion over roles, and lack of clear direction. These observations underscore the importance of effective management, clear expectations, and a commitment to staff development and wellbeing.

Since this research has been conducted, IPSA has since published "What's Democracy Worth? (January 2026)" a report setting out its response to a large scale public and stakeholder consultation on MPs pay, offices and staffing. IPSA's findings reinforce many of the challenges identified in this report, including the pressure on staffing capacity, the need to professionalise offices and the importance of supporting MPs to become more effective employers.

HOW THIS REPORT IS STRUCTURED

This report argues that many of the pressures facing MPs' offices are not inevitable consequences of political life, but the result of weak organisational foundations and under-designed digital infrastructure. MPs' offices are expected to deliver an ever-expanding mix of democratic, administrative, and pastoral work, yet they are left to do so with minimal guidance, inconsistent systems, and little shared learning.

To surface where and why offices struggle, we organise the report around six core constraints. Each section begins from a simple premise: **offices cannot improve if key foundations are missing.**

1. LEADERSHIP & VISION

Offices cannot improve if they don't know what they are trying to achieve

Many MPs' offices operate without a clear, shared sense of purpose or priorities. In the absence of strategic direction, teams respond to the loudest or most urgent demands, making it difficult to design roles, workflows, or processes that support long-term democratic impact.

2. ORGANISATION & SYSTEMS

Offices cannot improve without clear roles and processes

Office structures, job titles, and responsibilities vary widely across Parliament. While flexibility is often valued, the lack of consistent organisational models leads to blurred accountability, duplicated effort, and systems that depend on individual memory rather than durable processes.

3. MANAGEMENT & CULTURE

Offices cannot improve without professional management and supportive cultures

Many MPs have little experience managing staff or organisations, yet their leadership style strongly shapes office culture. Weak feedback, limited HR practices, and inconsistent management place heavy pressure on staff and contribute to stress, burnout, and high turnover.

4. SKILLS & RECRUITMENT

Offices cannot improve without the right skills and sustainable staffing models

Recruitment is often informal, time-pressured, and reliant on existing parliamentary networks. This narrows the talent pool, limits diversity of experience, and makes training and skill development uneven, particularly in operational and digital areas.

5. TECHNOLOGY & SOFTWARE

Offices cannot improve without access to usable, integrated tools

MPs' offices spend significant sums on software, yet technology use is fragmented and constrained by restrictive systems and unclear procurement pathways. Tools are frequently bolted onto broken workflows, limiting automation, insight, and long-term efficiency.

6. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT & ANALYTICS

Offices cannot improve over time without data, memory, and feedback loops

Despite handling large volumes of information, most offices lack systems to capture knowledge, analyse trends, or learn from experience. High staff turnover means insight is routinely lost, preventing offices and democratic practices from improving over time.

Taken together, these sections show how MPs' offices operate on **default settings**: personalised, reactive, and dependent on individual effort rather than institutional support. Without stronger foundations, reforms in any single area, whether technology, staffing, or funding, are unlikely to stick. Improving the effectiveness of MPs' offices therefore requires treating them not as ad hoc personal teams, but as essential democratic infrastructure worthy of deliberate design and sustained investment.

SECTION 1

LEADERSHIP & VISION

OFFICES CANNOT IMPROVE IF THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE

46% of staff we surveyed said that they did not have clear targets or goals they were working towards.

"[MP] is not amazing at giving direction, can be quite confusing sometimes, and can change their mind quite often about what they want."

MPs' offices carry enormous democratic responsibility but rarely begin with a clear vision of what they're for. Rather than being shaped by an explicit vision, the purpose of an office is often defined reactively by overflowing inboxes, urgent local crises, and shifting political pressures. In the absence of a shared goal, staff are left to interpret their job day-by-day. This leads to confusion, fragmented ways of working, and difficulty coordinating effort across the office. This lack of clarity makes it harder for teams to decide what matters most, allocate time effectively, or build consistent approaches to their work.

This section explores how a lack of clarity about purpose drives fragmentation and why rethinking the role of the MP's office is key to strengthening democracy.

MOST MPS HAVE NO PAST EXPERIENCE OF ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Most MPs enter Parliament with little to no experience running organisations, yet their style significantly shapes the culture and function of the office. Pete Wishart MP put it plainly:

"It has always struck me that many of us - I include myself - came to the House with no experience whatsoever of managing staff or making sure that we have a staff complement who are available and ready to do very complex and demanding work."

In 2019, 64% of new MPs came from politics adjacent professions, such as councillors, researchers, trade unionists, journalists, or lobbyists. Few had formal training or experience leading organisations. One staffer urged:

"Familiarise yourself with the work your staff will be doing... many Members have no idea what their staff's jobs are, what their workload consists of, what software they use."

"Too many MPs have never employed/managed people before - they need to be self aware of this."

The quality of the working environment varies greatly depending on the MP. Where Members foster supportive, communicative cultures and set clear priorities, staff report feeling more empowered and less overwhelmed. In other cases, weak leadership and poor planning exacerbate stress.

"Ask about the MP you work for! The pre-2010/15 MPs tend to treat staff much better than others."

"Her time is so pressurised, knowing that I might just get 30mins on a Friday between meetings to go through what I'd like to discuss in like 2 hours."

The attitude of the individual MP towards their office and their own role within it has a significant impact on its effectiveness. Those office staff we surveyed highlighted this as the main aspect they found difficult to grasp.

When you first started, were there any aspects of your role that you found more difficult to get to grips with?

"Just the individual Member's particular style, which varies highly across the three MPs I worked for."

"The MP's idiosyncrasies."

What are the hardest parts of your job?

"Getting the Member to sign off pieces of work to be sent out"

"Managing my Members' expectations."

OFFICES ARE REACTIVE INSTEAD OF STRATEGIC

"I have no time to do my actual job, I'm running around like a headless chicken just reacting to stuff."

While MPs' offices are often busy and responsive, many lack a clear sense of direction. Staff are expected to juggle inboxes, casework, media, events, executive support, research, and admin - but without an agreed set of priorities, it becomes difficult to know what really matters. In our survey, **46% of respondents said they did not have clear targets or goals** they were working towards. In practice, this can mean spending most of their time firefighting emails or handling local service issues without any wider plan. It also becomes very difficult to create processes, systems or workflows if the MP does not provide clear direction.

This lack of clarity originates with the leadership - the MPs themselves. While a few offer clear direction and structure, many struggle to set expectations, delegate effectively, or articulate what success looks like. One staff member said:

"I wish there was a clear set of strategic objectives to work towards e.g., the Member's manifesto for their constituency. That could bring focus."

Without a shared understanding of what the office is trying to achieve, whether that's a focus on housing casework, campaigning on specific policy issues, or building local media presence, teams are left working reactively. Some offices attempt to tie their work back to the MP's original vision, but this is rarely supported by formal goal-setting or planning tools.

"Maintain rigid focus on what you were elected on and make sure the team know and understand how their role factors into that!"

The absence of clear direction is particularly acute when an MP is newly elected or has limited organisational experience. Offices are often built from scratch with no handover, little support, and few resources. As one interviewee put it:

"We had a brand new MP with a brand new team who'd never worked in/with Parliament before. A basic 'this is what you need your office to do' would have been great."

The result is a workplace where staff may be deeply committed, but are unsure how to prioritise, evaluate success, or push forward meaningful work. This can contribute to stress, inefficiency, and a sense of disconnect between individual roles and collective purpose.

"It is very reactive, very fire-fighting. I would like more processes in place, and strategies for comms and casework. I'm a process-driven person and want to get organised in that way."

One staffer offered this advice:

"Be clear about how you want your office to run. Don't let it run you."

THE PUBLIC DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT MPS' OFFICES ARE FOR

At the same time, many staff are grappling with a broader lack of clarity: not just what their office is aiming for internally, but what the public expects from MPs at all. The role of a Member of Parliament is inherently broad, combining legislative duties, scrutiny, advocacy, and constituency service. However, there is little consensus about how that role should be prioritised or communicated.

"People's first port of call now is the MP's office, where it might have previously been a service. We are really bearing the brunt of the lack of services available to people."

Staff reported that constituents often approached the MP's office for help with local services, such as bins, potholes, or parking, that are technically the responsibility of councils or other bodies. Yet in the absence of strong local institutions and processes, MPs' offices often become the de facto fall back safety net.

"A lot of the office work is nothing to do with the parliamentary role of an MP. A lot that comes in should really sit with the council, but a lot of the time local councillors might be from another party."

In offices where there is no clear set of priorities, staff priorities end up becoming ad hoc and reactive based on incoming requests. Coupled with high staff turnover and poor knowledge management, this severely undermines organisational capacity-building of offices over time.

CONCLUSION

These findings point to a lack of leadership and strategic clarity as foundational constraints on how MPs' offices function. Where purpose is unclear and expectations are not articulated, offices default to reactivity: responding to the loudest demands, relying on individual judgement, and building ad hoc systems to cope. This places a heavy burden on staff, obscures accountability, and makes it difficult to evaluate success or learn over time.

It also has knock-on effects for everything else this report examines: from team structure and knowledge management to technology procurement and automation. Without a shared vision of what an MP's office is for, tools cannot be chosen strategically, processes cannot be embedded, and staff cannot reliably see how their work contributes to democratic outcomes.

Strengthening leadership capacity, supporting MPs to articulate clear priorities, and providing practical frameworks for office design are therefore not "soft" interventions: they are prerequisites for more effective, resilient, and democratically responsive parliamentary offices.

SECTION 2

ORGANISATION & SYSTEMS

OFFICES CANNOT IMPROVE WITHOUT THE RIGHT ROLES AND PROCESSES

"There are no systems or processes, we just respond as best we can"

In 2022-2023 MPs' offices recruited positions with 89 different job titles.

High-performing organisations are able to hire and retain skilled staff and build efficient systems because roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. This clarity supports professionalisation, accountability, and the gradual development of consistent best practice over time.

By contrast, weaker organisations are often those with a lack of organisational maturity. These tend to experience higher turnover, rely on idiosyncratic or ad hoc processes, and operate in a culture of reactivity and stress. Operations are shaped by informal norms, with limited awareness of what mature, systematised organisational environments look like.

In MPs' offices, this immaturity shows up in unclear or unstable roles, poorly defined responsibilities, and an absence of standard processes to guide day-to-day work. Rather than being designed deliberately, workflows tend to evolve informally in response to immediate pressures.

This lack of organisational maturity creates predictable inefficiencies. When roles and responsibilities are unclear, work is duplicated or missed, decisions are escalated unnecessarily, and staff compensate by over-communicating to avoid mistakes. Time and effort are absorbed by coordination and reassurance rather than delivery, reinforcing a culture of reactivity and stress.

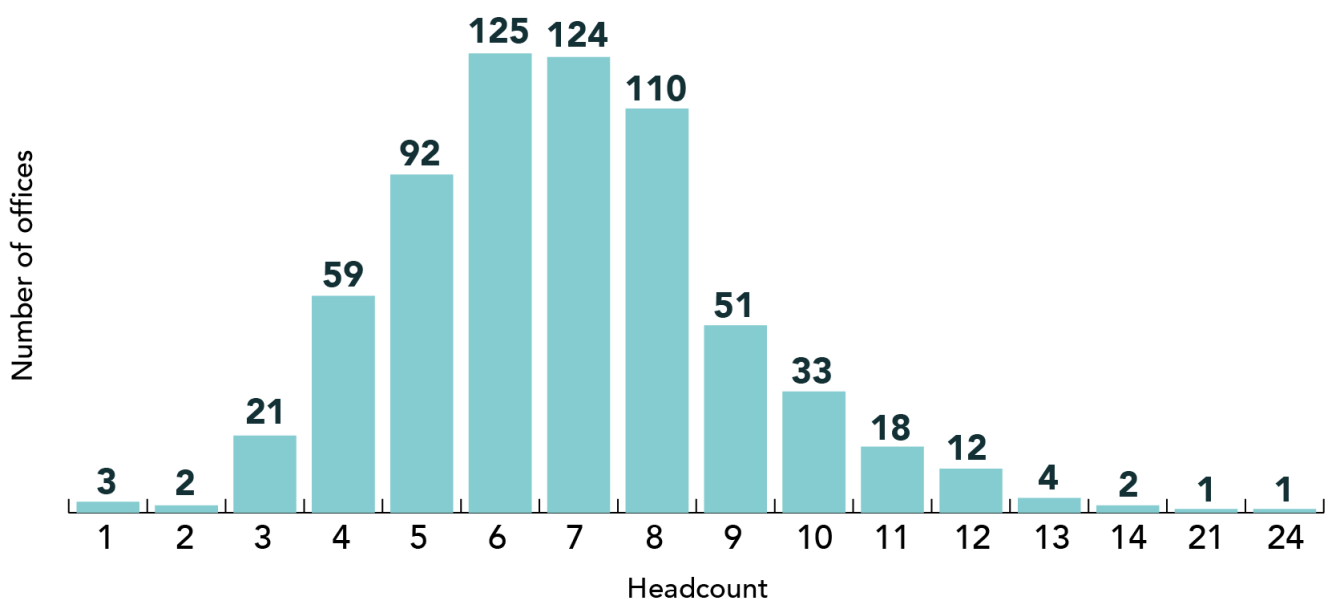
While this report recognises that political environments are high-stakes, we attribute this lack of organisational maturity observed in offices primarily to a shortage of operational experience in the staffing pipeline - there's nothing intrinsic to offices that would prevent them from performing at a much higher level; the limiting factors are organisational design, skills, and deliberate investment, rather than the nature of the sector itself.

OFFICES HAVE INCONSISTENT STRUCTURES

One of the clearest themes to emerge is the inconsistency in how MPs structure their offices. As individual employers, MPs have considerable autonomy over how they use their staffing budgets, choosing the size and composition of their team, job roles, and whether to recruit full-time, part-time, or unpaid support. Some MPs prioritise hiring fewer but more experienced staff with relevant policy expertise; others rely more on larger number of interns or volunteers.

"We do a lot of studentships and interns where we can - about to have two come in one day per week from the uni. They'll help with casework policy research."

CHART 1
DISTRIBUTION OF OFFICE STAFF SIZES



While the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) sets out frameworks for salaries and contracts, MPs still retain significant discretion. This flexibility can lead to innovation, but it can also result in inconsistencies and inequalities. In 2022-2023 MPs' offices recruited positions with 89 different job titles.

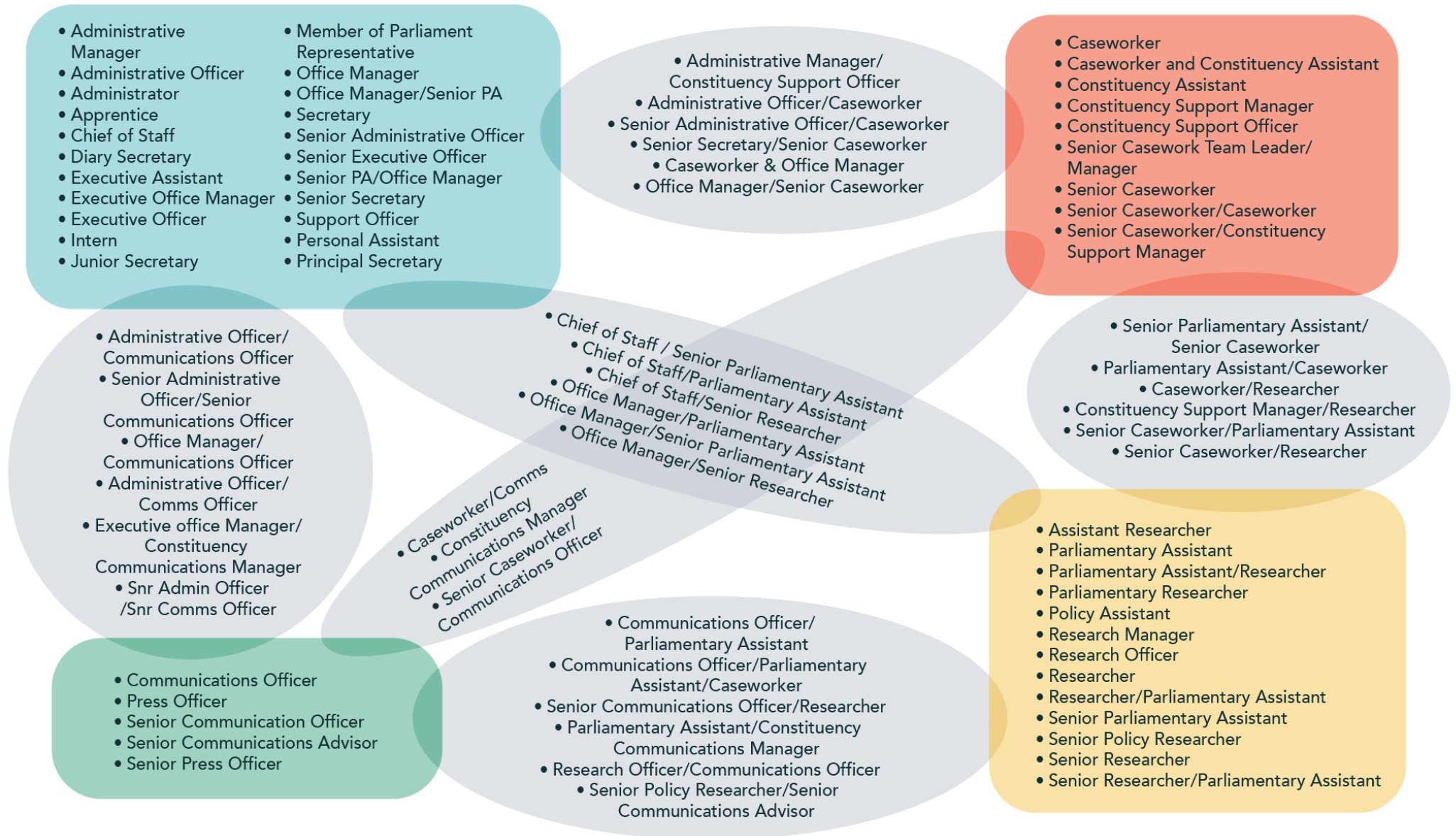
The large number of different job titles used across MPs' offices contributes directly to inconsistent team structures. In the absence of a small set of standardised roles with clearly defined expectations, MPs design teams idiosyncratically, shaped by personal preference, past experience, or immediate pressures rather than a shared organisational model. This makes it difficult to compare roles across offices, transfer staff between teams, or establish common pathways for progression and development.

OFFICES LACK CLEAR ROLES

The proliferation of job titles is closely linked to the blurring of roles within MPs' offices and unclear role boundaries. While many titles appear similar in name, they often mask significant variation in responsibilities, seniority, and decision-making authority between offices. It also increases the risk of duplication, gaps in responsibility, and misalignment between job titles and the work actually being carried out.

Below is a diagram showing the 89 different job titles MPs recruited for between 2022 and 2023, showing the significant overlap between many different combinations of functions and roles.

FIGURE 1
JOB TITLES MPS RECRUITED FOR BETWEEN 2022 AND 2023



Many teams describe deliberately flexible ways of working in which staff “do a bit of everything”, pitch in across functions, and avoid rigid silos. This is often experienced positively, fostering collaboration, mutual support, and resilience in small teams operating under constant pressure.

“People are very supportive of other team members, we pitch in together if there’s something (say a video needs uploading) and spread the skillset and the support. Constituency and Westminster teams work closely and collaboratively.”

“There’s not much siloed working, the office manager for example helps me with frontbench stuff. We’ll help each other out, complain about things etc so we all know what everyone is working on.”

“We have ‘campaign casework hour’ where we all sit together for an hour doing our policy casework. It makes it fun but also because we’re all there you can just ask any questions.”

However, the absence of clearly defined roles and boundaries also has less visible consequences. When responsibilities are diffuse and job titles do not reliably signal what someone is accountable for, it becomes harder to ensure that essential functions are consistently owned and workflows developed. Informal flexibility can mask gaps in capacity, make workloads uneven or invisible, and leave critical work dependent on individual initiative rather than role design.

“We don’t have defined roles as such, we all do a bit of everything.”

Without job descriptions or role clarity, some MPs end up micromanaging staff.

“[Member] still manages all her own emails and will distribute those between us.”

Despite the chaos, many staff appreciated the flexibility they had in managing their workload and the relative lack of hierarchy. This autonomy was described as both empowering and sometimes isolating.

“Tends to be mostly autonomous. On a normal day we have 2 full time caseworkers who know their job, I don’t need to allocate their work to them.”

“I’m quite good at managing my own time anyway, which is just as well, but it can be quite different.”

OFFICES LACK MATURE OR STANDARDISED SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

The wide scope of tasks would be easier to manage if standardised systems or processes were in place, but most offices lack formal structures, leading staff to develop their own ad hoc solutions. One caseworker reflected:

"It was really difficult when I started to get my head around it all. It's like nothing else, it's such a different environment... there just isn't that sort of structure here."

This absence of guidance means staff are left to design workflows on their own.

"I developed our inbox processes and tracking system from scratch, there was nothing there before."

Ultimately, whether systems work or not often depends on individual personalities.

"It depends on the office manager. Some are amazing. Some are just overwhelmed."

In many offices, keeping track of work relies entirely on individuals:

"We don't use any workflow systems, just rely on people keeping track."

"One employee just uses Outlook as her to-do list."

"I'm often not clear on what's expected or what the priorities are."

This is particularly evident in the wide variety of strategies that staff members develop to manage their MPs' inbox, such as filters, folders, shared inboxes, inbox rules, and tagging systems.

"In the Member's inbox the team all have their own subfolders"

"They monitor the MPs' inbox probably 18 hours a day and try to stick to a limit of emails left for the Member."

"If for example we have 70 emails over the weekend, I set myself up an Outlook folder and put them all in there so that I can deal with them later in the week."

Similarly, ad hoc systems have been developed for the management of casework. While there is no formal requirement for MPs to undertake casework, in practice it forms a huge part of office activity with offices typically dealing with thousands of cases a year. Staff typically divide casework according to specialisms, capacity, or who picks up the case first. Several of our interviewees reflected on their casework load, complexity and distribution:

"[The] office manager and [a] caseworker both work on casework. [The] office manager manages the Member's inbox and pops [any cases] into [CASEWORKER MP]...and [the caseworker] just gets on [with it]. [They] will send me a message if [they] need any help or clarification"

"One specialised in immigration and will lead on that, and the other became an expert on business related enquiries as well as benefits and housing."

"If it's policy type stuff for the government, it goes to one particular member of the team. Beyond that, problem solving casework tends to be divided along the lines of skillset/ what people do the most of."

"Any casework that requires going to a department or minister, will go to the senior caseworker. The office manager will deal with the more local or less hot button casework like the frog bridge."

Offices also adopt different approaches to handling policy-related inquiries and campaign emails, with a focus on personalising responses and involving the MP in complex or sensitive matters. Responding to all campaign emails, even if with a standard response, is seen as important engagement with constituents.

"We respond to anybody that contacts us, even campaign emails... People in our area tend to be most concerned about animal rights and we get a lot of correspondence related to that."

"Policy casework - we don't have one person on this, we all do it across the office. We do use the PRS (Parliament Research Service) but the Member doesn't love those responses so we will personalise and change them up quite a lot."

In managing this complexity, offices tend towards lowest common denominator technology such as spreadsheets instead of modern case management / customer service software.

"We have a policy casework spreadsheet, if it's all green its done."

"We have a spreadsheet. We will pick and put our names next to [cases] and update when they've been done."

The most popular dedicated casework tool used by offices is caseworker.mp, a tool built by a former staffer which has an effective monopoly due to Parliament keeping a tight control on software that MPs are allowed to use.

“The awfulness of Caseworker - it would not be tolerated for 5 minutes in [the] private sector.”

“[Caseworker] is generally third-rate compared to systems I used and commissioned in the private sector”

“Caseworker could do with a lot of improvements - it’s alright, it’s expensive... there are things in it that are not terribly user friendly.”

Modern casework systems allow many kinds of process improvements, such as automated inbox triage, automated tagging and categorisation, sophisticated templating, systems to manage assignment and escalation, audit trails, and performance reporting. In a typical service environment, these features reduce reliance on individual memory, manage prioritisation, and allow work to be distributed predictably across a team. They will also be able to integrate with other systems, such as social media management tools, to allow integrated end-to-end workflows.

However, MPs’ offices face practical barriers to adopting and benefiting from these tools. Even where suitable tools exist, there is rarely dedicated operational ownership to translate “a piece of software” into a functioning workflow, with defined roles, standards, and training. As a result, technology tends to be used as a patch for immediate problems rather than as part of a coherent operating model.

The consequences are predictable. When systems and processes are informal, casework becomes difficult to prioritise and hand over, particularly during staff turnover, absence, or high-volume surges. Work is less transparent, quality is inconsistent, and performance depends heavily on individual experience and personal organisation. Staff report duplicative effort, lost context, and uncertainty about what “done” means, especially where the Member remains the bottleneck for decisions or outbound communication. The reliance on instant messaging can make urgent coordination easier, but it also fragments information across channels, increases interruption costs, and makes it harder to maintain a reliable record of decisions and actions.

CONSTANT COMMUNICATION COMPENSATES FOR LACK OF STRUCTURE

In many MPs’ offices, constant communication has emerged as a practical substitute for formal structure, clear delegation, or established processes. Instant messaging platforms in particular are used to coordinate work, resolve uncertainty, and make rapid decisions in the absence of clearly defined workflows or decision rights. As one staff member noted,

“Lucky that [Member] is very responsive on WhatsApp and we can sort out anything urgent that way.”

Offices frequently operate multiple parallel messaging channels to manage different strands of work.

"We have a number of WhatsApps, our general one is quite fun and silly, we have one for social media, one for council issues, one for comms, one for policy casework."

This proliferation of channels supports speed, accessibility, and team cohesion, especially in fast-moving or high-pressure situations. Microsoft Teams is also used in offices but often sits alongside WhatsApp.

While this communication density helps teams function day to day, it can also obscure the absence of more durable processes. Decisions, instructions, and knowledge are frequently exchanged in real time rather than embedded in shared systems or documented workflows, making them harder to track, retrieve, or hand over. Some offices are aware of this tension, with one noting,

"We communicate well, possibly too many WhatsApp streams and things but for the number of people involved it's quite cohesive."

Over time, reliance on constant messaging to coordinate reinforces reactive working patterns, and cements the MP as a bottleneck as they could in principle review the team's every decision in real time.

"[The hardest part of my job is] getting the Member to sign off pieces of work to be sent out"

CONCLUSION

Overall, the picture is one of dedicated, flexible, and overworked staff working without clear systems or support. While many offices have created effective workarounds, the absence of shared infrastructure and the variability in expectations and processes point to an urgent need for better onboarding, tools, and opportunities for peer learning.

Good technology depends on good workflows. Without clear processes for how work moves through an MP's office (who does what, when, and how) even the best tools can create confusion rather than clarity.

When workflows are inconsistent or improvised, staff end up using technology in ad hoc ways, leading to duplication, data loss, and missed handovers. This lack of structure is one reason why existing efforts at automation have often fallen short - without a solid underlying process, automating just accelerates the chaos.

The pain points and suggestions detailed in this section provide a glimpse at how even modest improvements across a range of areas could both improve the job satisfaction of MP office staffers, the effectiveness of the office in managing casework and constituent enquiries - and chiefly, with significant downstream effects on the running of Parliament and democratic outcomes.

SECTION 3

MANAGEMENT & CULTURE

OFFICES CANNOT IMPROVE WITHOUT PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORTIVE CULTURES

30% of survey respondents do not receive any feedback on their performance.

"Some MPs don't look at their own emails at all and delegate the whole thing to the office manager and will have no idea what happens in their office."

Management and culture play a decisive role in shaping how MPs' offices function day to day. While individual staff often show extraordinary commitment and resilience, the effectiveness and sustainability of an office depends heavily on the quality of leadership, management practices, and workplace norms set by the MP and senior staff. This section examines how gaps in management, weak HR processes, and unhealthy workplace cultures contribute to burnout, inconsistency, and avoidable stress, despite the critical public service these offices provide.

OFFICE WORK CULTURES CAN BE UNHEALTHY

Our interviews provided a detailed picture of the everyday challenges faced by parliamentary staff, and one issue was endemic: the overwhelming workload. Staff routinely described being inundated with casework, emails, and other duties, often stretching far beyond the confines of a normal working day and blurring the boundaries between their personal and professional lives. Many said they felt constantly in reactive mode, without the space or structure to think

proactively or strategically. While the work can be meaningful, the unpredictability of daily demands and the consistently high workload contribute to sustained stress and burnout for many staff members.

"Even within the confines of my own home, my work is always on my mind, the huge workload and pressures are ever constant, the worry about a vulnerable constituent or an important case left over the weekend is not far from my thoughts, my emails are at my fingertips, a text or a call from the Member needing something or asking a question."

"This is not a 9-5 job, it never ends. The inbox is relentless with hundreds of messages a day."

"Casework is absolutely relentless in our office - I work evenings as well, I watch TV at night keeping an eye on the emails coming in."

"Task management is very hard - there's just so much to do, and most of it is urgent... I often work 2-3 hours in the evenings and on weekends."

"I have even stopped socialising within the constituency... more often than not, I will run into a constituent who may ask for help or advice."

SOME MPS NEGLECT THEIR OFFICES

A common finding from our interviews is staff desiring for more input from MPs. As noted in the House of Commons' "Members of Parliament as Employers: A Good Practice Guide" (2012):

"The level of your own engagement with the running of your office will have a significant effect on its ability to support you. Your own time spent in managing the people in your office and thinking forward to head off any problems before they get out of hand is probably the most important factor in keeping the office efficient and happy."

This sentiment is echoed by many of our interviewees, who emphasised the value of consistent contact with their MP, whether through in-person meetings, WhatsApp messages, or email exchanges.

"Her time is so pressurised, knowing that I might just get 30mins on a Friday between meetings to go through what I'd like to discuss in like 2 hours."

"I would like the Member to be available a bit more for the staff"

"[MPs only] do 1-2-1 with staff every couple of months"

While few staff expect MPs to micromanage day-to-day work, a lack of regular engagement creates real operational problems. Staff described uncertainty about priorities, decision-making thresholds, and political judgement calls, particularly in casework and correspondence where escalation is often ambiguous. Without routine contact, staff are left to infer preferences, act conservatively, or manage risk inconsistently, which can slow responses and make offices more reactive. Over time, this also affects morale: in high-pressure environments, limited access to the MP can leave staff feeling unsupported, disconnected from the office's political goals, and unsure whether their work is valued.

This is not primarily a question of delegation versus control, but of operating clarity. Delegating inboxes or casework can be effective, but without clear expectations, feedback loops, and shared understanding of decision-rights, responsibility is pushed down without direction.

OFFICES LACK BASIC HR PROCESSES

One of the most overlooked gaps in MPs' offices is the absence of even basic HR systems. Most teams lack structured ways to set goals, track progress, record performance feedback, or support development conversations. Simple HR tools, such as digital induction checklists, role clarity templates, leave tracking, or performance review frameworks - could provide staff with a clearer sense of expectations, recognition, and progression.

While some offices pay for HR software, this is rare. Without these systems, office culture depends entirely on individual relationships and initiative, creating inconsistency and stress. Investing in lightweight, user-friendly HR tools would not only improve retention and wellbeing, but also help professionalise how offices operate.

STAFF LACK OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEEDBACK AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

According to our survey, **30% of respondents reported not receiving feedback on their personal performance.**

[Research by Unite](#) has similarly found that **1 in 5 office staff are 'not at all' happy with professional development opportunities.**

The lack of formal development systems was also raised by the [Speaker's Conference](#):

"Parliament's collective failure to champion the important work undertaken by Members' staff... is both demoralising... and has a debilitating impact on their practical ability to do their job."

Even small gaps in communication or leadership can have knock-on effects. As one person noted:

"I would like him to spend more time with the team, and more time with the constituency. He's not great at saying thank you or praise, if he says nothing it means everything is fine, but then if there is a problem he will say something."

STAFF REGULARLY DEAL WITH TRAUMATIC SITUATIONS BUT LACK MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

MPs' staff are frequently the first point of contact for people in distress, many of whom are struggling with mental health crises, facing homelessness, or navigating traumatic immigration or welfare cases. These issues often fall to staff who lack mental health training, clear safeguarding protocols, or access to clinical advice.

"Speaking to constituents - we have some frequent flyers, some are quite unwell, and we aren't equipped to deal with that."

"Has no training on that - no set procedure when encountering one of these. People in the room can hear, and will check in on you, and you can let off steam. But there's no 'this is what you do' other than the guidance around phoning the police."

"People who want to call up and just have a general moan, or who are lonely and just want to talk to you, you can easily be on the phone for 45 minutes. It just goes with the job."

"The role of an MP's office has evolved into a fourth emergency service."

Toxicity in politics and public discourse places additional emotional burdens on staff. Interviewees repeatedly raised the issue of constituent abuse, aggressive communication, and the impact of being on the front line of public anger.

"It isn't necessarily the individual cases, it's the amount - how many emails come in, how many cases. After a while, it's the tone that gets to you."

"After a media appearance for example - there will be abuse, 'all politicians are scum'. It's grating having to ignore/delete and go through all this stuff."

"I have personally been threatened [sic], verbally abused and received concerning phone calls but that is a part of the job, and it has almost become normal to me now."

- Anonymous written evidence SPC0032, Speaker's Conference

"One of the biggest challenges you'll face is coping with the level of public disdain that attaches to being an MP... thinking that you're some sort of subspecies, who can be treated like dirt."

- Fox, R. (2015), *The First 100 Days: A Survival Guide for New MPs*

"Abuse of the MP, threats over foreign policy, and violence."

Despite the challenges, very few offices appear to have access to consistent mental health support, structured debriefing practices, or trauma-informed training. The burden of managing emotionally intense and unpredictable work, often without guidance, leads many staff to feel isolated and unsupported.

Survey data supports this picture. The [Wellness Working Group](#) has been monitoring staff wellbeing since 2020. Their first survey found that 49.7% of staff scored above the threshold for high psychological distress; a more recent survey showed some improvement, with 41.7% still exceeding this threshold. While increases in staffing budgets and the creation of the Member Services Team may have helped, the figures remain concerning, suggesting persistent structural pressures within the workplace.

While some teams have developed informal practices of peer support, such as checking in after tough calls or distributing high-stress work more evenly, most are doing this in the absence of any formal systems. The need for more structured interventions, mental health training, safeguarding protocols, peer support networks, and guidance around working hours, is urgent if the workplace is to become more sustainable.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the evidence in this section points to a systemic failure of management rather than individual shortcomings. MPs' offices are operating under intense pressure, with staff carrying extraordinary workloads, emotional labour, and public-facing risk, yet without the basic management, HR, and wellbeing structures that would be considered standard in almost any other workplace. Where management is absent or inconsistent, culture defaults to reactivity, overwork, and silence. Staff work longer hours, absorb trauma, and make judgement calls in isolation, often without feedback, recognition, or support.

Crucially, many of these problems are not inevitable consequences of political life. Interviewees were clear that even modest interventions, such as regular check-ins with MPs, clearer role expectations, simple HR processes, access to mental health training, and visible leadership, would materially improve both staff wellbeing and office effectiveness. The variability between offices shows that culture is not fixed; it is shaped by management choices, tools, and norms.

IPSA has recently emphasised the importance of supporting MPs to discharge their responsibilities as employers, including through training, guidance, and the piloting of a new leadership-level staff role. Our findings reinforce this direction of travel.

Without professional management and a deliberate investment in healthy workplace culture, offices risk continued burnout, high turnover, and declining effectiveness at precisely the moment when constituents' needs are becoming more complex and acute. Improving management and culture is therefore not a nice to have, but a foundational requirement for MPs' offices to function sustainably, support their staff, and serve the public well.

SECTION 4

SKILLS & RECRUITMENT

OFFICES CANNOT IMPROVE WITHOUT THE RIGHT PEOPLE WITH THE RIGHT SKILLS

68% of MPs in the year 2022-2023 had more than £20,000 left in their staffing budgets.

“There isn’t specifically any training on how to run an office, IPSA do courses/webinars on components like the budgets and things like that.”

While MPs’ office budgets may appear generous on paper, in practice they are restrictive and modest when compared with organisations of a similar scope and responsibility in other sectors. Although millions of pounds are allocated each year through staffing budgets, MPs face significant constraints in how those resources can be deployed, including hiring caps, inflexible salary bands, and the reputational risks associated with public scrutiny of spending. These constraints shape not only the size of office teams, but also how staff are recruited, trained, and supported.

At the same time, many offices spend substantial sums on outsourced services or short-term staffing arrangements to plug persistent gaps in capacity. This section examines how resources are allocated and used in practice, where inefficiencies and workarounds emerge, and how these dynamics affect recruitment and skills development within MPs’ offices. Drawing on interviews and survey data, it explores how hiring is often conducted under acute time pressure, frequently through informal or inconsistent processes, and how training and professional development are unevenly accessed and delivered.

The section also considers how staff acquire the operational, digital, and managerial skills required for an increasingly complex role, including the balance between formal parliamentary training, informal peer learning, and self-directed adaptation. Together, these findings highlight how current approaches to recruitment, training, and resource design shape value for public money, staff experience, and the capacity of MPs’ offices to deliver effective support for constituents and contribute to stronger democratic outcomes.

NEGATIVE MEDIA COVERAGE DISSUADES SPENDING

One of the recurring themes from our interviews is that many staff members believe negative media coverage of MPs’ expenses has made Members of Parliament more reluctant to fully utilise their IPSA staffing budgets. Because staff costs are recorded as part of an MP’s expenses, some MPs fear public backlash for appearing to spend too much, even when hiring more staff would significantly improve their office’s ability to serve constituents.

"MP's offices are quite obviously under-resourced. It's an insane expectation that MPs are able to respond to ~200/300 emails per day with £153,000 of staffing budget. The fact that MPs' offices are plugging the holes between various tiers in the political system just isn't reflected in that budget."

"Some MPs don't like to use their whole budget out of a fear of the published spending and that it makes them look bad. So lots of offices might have unpaid interns, or instead of giving people specific roles and responsibilities, have a bunch of constituency assistants doing a melange of roles. They can be on very low wages in this way, and based up in the constituency."

Others encouraged MPs to use their full staffing allowance to maximise office capacity and improve the quality of support and decision-making:

"Use the full budget. You'll always have a small team but try and maximise the numbers because the more people you have, the wider the range of opinions and feedback you can get for campaigning ideas and for tackling casework."

CHART 2
% OF MPS UNDERSPENDING

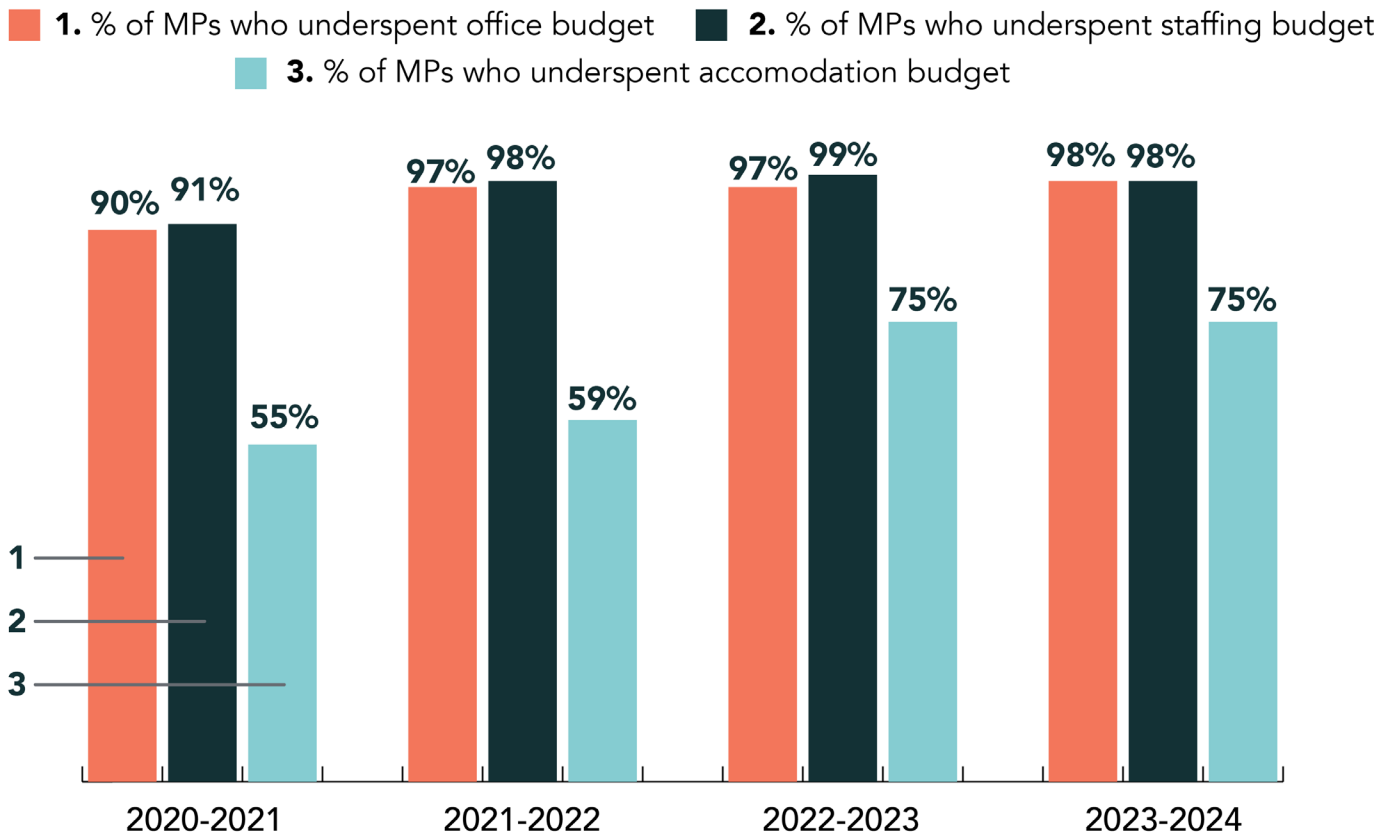
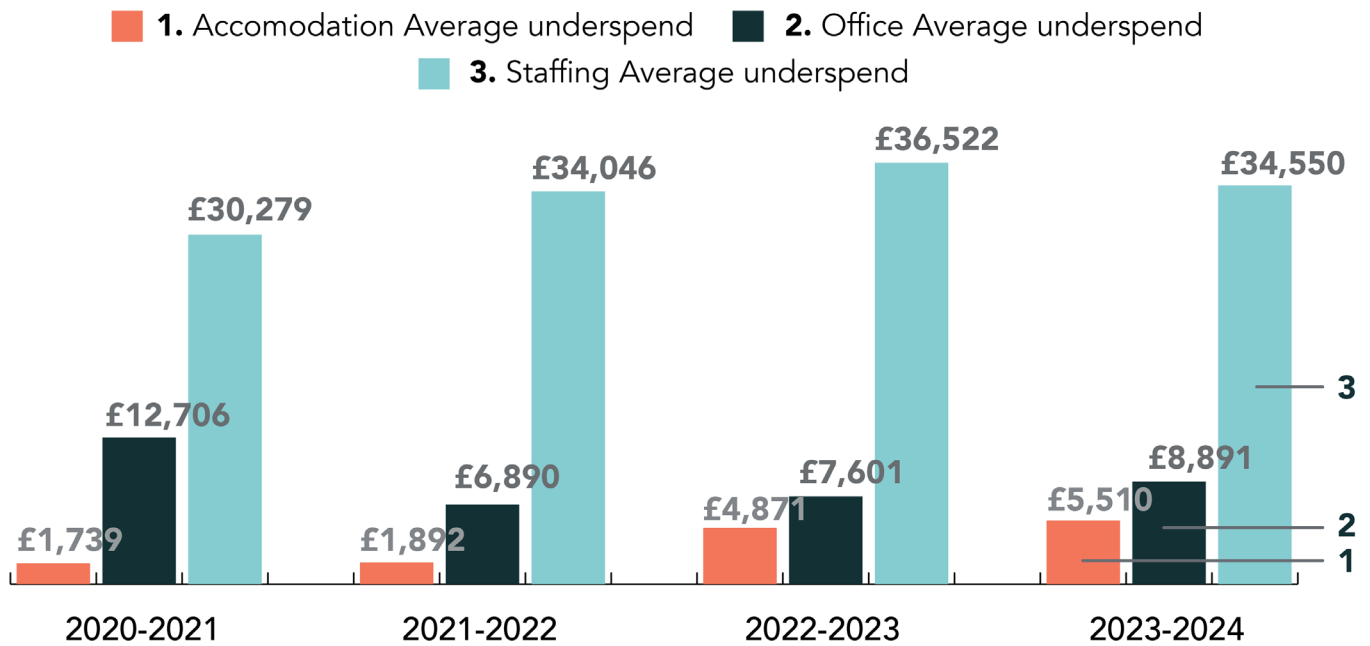


CHART 3

AVERAGE UNDERSPEND IN £



OFFICES PLUG THE GAPS WITH INTERNS, VOLUNTEERS, PLACEMENTS, AND TEMPS

Given these constraints, some offices adopt flexible staffing models to stretch their budgets. Several interviewees mentioned using interns, studentships, placements, or short-term contracts to supplement their permanent team:

"We do a lot of studentships and interns where we can, about to have two come in one day per week from the uni."

"We sometimes have [interns] paid by other sources"

"Centre for Theology and Community give you a part-time placement"

These arrangements provide critical flexibility, but they also highlight deeper structural issues, namely, that the current staffing budget often falls short of what's required to run a fully functional, responsive office. The ability to draw on external funding sources or community partnerships can offer a temporary solution, but it's not a substitute for a sustainable and equitable staffing model supported by Parliament and IPSA.

RECRUITMENT IS OFTEN THROUGH INFORMAL NETWORKS DRAWING FROM A NARROW POOL

Recruiting practices vary from office to office, but personal networks play a significant role; 47% of respondents already knew the Member or someone in their office and 59% of respondents had prior experience working for an MP before their current role. While prior parliamentary experience can reduce onboarding time, heavy reliance on existing networks narrows the pool

of candidates, limits socio-economic and professional diversity, and reinforces informal norms about “how things are done” rather than encouraging new skills or perspectives. At a system level, this contributes to stagnation: practices, tools, and assumptions are recycled across offices with limited challenge or renewal, slowing the uptake of improved ways of working and entrenching wide variation in quality and effectiveness between MPs’ offices.

The most common method of recruitment mentioned in interviews was through a website called W4MP:

“Applied on W4MP - ‘where all the jobs are’. Submitted a cover and CV, had one interview with two of the team and then had a call later that day saying I had the job.”

“I saw the job advertised on W4MP, knew of the Member and knew of their interests and priorities and that they really aligned with my own personal interests.”

“Recruited senior caseworker using W4MP. Also a junior PA, and have just advertised for constituency assistant in the same way.”

However, many roles are filled through informal networks, word-of-mouth, or direct transitions from volunteering:

“Started off as a student volunteering for [Member], campaigning in the general election campaign. They had some budget left so they started paying me, and then when a caseworker left the team they needed a member of staff.”

“Was doing some volunteering work because of the election, the campaign manager asked if I would help out. Met the MP and they asked if I would join the team (they weren’t in post yet).”

“With the previous MP, I was cheeky to be honest. When he won his election I sidled up to him and said ‘you’ll be needing an assistant’ and he told me to write him a letter. I think he interviewed about 6 people and offered it to me.”

“PA used to work for the Labour party and had known MP for a long time and was very involved in the campaign, persuaded [interviewee] to take the role.”

Some offices rely on known networks:

“In my previous job, the caseworkers were well known to the existing MP and so were offered the roles off the back of informal chats.”

SELECTION PROCESSES ARE OFTEN INCONSISTENT AND UNSTRUCTURED

Staff frequently noted that hiring processes for MP office staff lack consistency and professional standards. Only a minority of interviewees reported undertaking structured assessments. Data from the survey found that just 32% were asked for references, 23% for examples of work, and 29% completed a task.

Interview panels vary in size and formality, sometimes involving community representatives or local councillors:

"Interviewed by MP, a local councillor, and someone who ran a local advice centre."

"Recruitment - just a CV and cover letter for shortlisting, a 45 minute interview with the Member, office manager and the PA in the constituency."

"Held one interview with candidates."

"For the caseworker, we had all the interviews on Teams because of geography. We had a panel of three (office manager, PA, MP) and we asked and scored the same questions to each candidate."

Some offices incorporate practical exercises:

"For the internship we asked them to write a policy email to a constituent complaining about the migrant barges. For the diary manager we did an in-tray exercise."

"We always ask for a CV and cover letter, we shortlist to around 5-6 candidates, some kind of test or activity and a 30-40 min interview."

"Application - [I only] had to write a speech, interview [for security clearance]"

However, as one office manager noted, there is little structured support from Parliament:

"I have developed an inbox exercise and letter writing exercise we use. I was surprised parliamentary HR doesn't have a suggested set of competencies and recruitment materials to support."

PARLIAMENTARY EXPERIENCE AND POLITICAL ALIGNMENT IS PRIORITISED

Recruitment practices in MPs' offices tend to prioritise prior parliamentary experience and political alignment, narrowing the pool of potential candidates and reinforcing an insular labour market. Staff described hiring processes that favour those already working in or closely connected to Parliament. There is often a preference for candidates with prior parliamentary experience, which significantly reduces the pool of candidates.

"A relatively insular process advertised to folks already in the industry or actively looking, and with a preference for candidates who have experience in an MPs office."

"It makes it very difficult for new starters in Parliament, that whole old private school setup, it's up to you to find out, to go through an initiation process."

This preference is often driven by acute capacity pressures: experienced candidates can start with minimal training in small teams under constant strain. Offices are frequently explicit that they want candidates who can "hit the ground running", reducing the perceived risk of onboarding but limiting opportunities for new entrants.

"Needed a caseworker and interviewed various people and took on someone who had worked for another MP that had lost their seat. Just slipped in and didn't need any training, which is one of the great attractions."

"We're hoping if we get the right person, because we were quite specific about the experience we wanted, that they'll be able to hit the ground running."

For those we interviewed political alignment was an important factor:

"Ensure staff have campaigned for the relevant party, or at least have a commitment/sympathy to the party."

"MPs' staff require an understanding of a political environment."

Political alignment is widely treated as a prerequisite rather than as something which can be developed over time with experience. While this reflects the political nature of the work, it further constrains recruitment, making it harder to bring in people with transferable skills from outside Parliament.

Together, these dynamics reduce diversity of background and experience, concentrate knowledge within a closed system, and reinforce reliance on informal norms and networks rather than structured training and professional development.

THERE ARE GAPS IN TRAINING PROVISION ESPECIALLY WITH DIGITAL AND OPERATIONAL SKILLS

The health of a democracy depends on the people who make it work, yet many MP staffers do not feel able to develop skills. A significant number of staff feel that they are not equipped with the training needed to do their jobs well. According to our survey, **23% of respondents do not believe they have received the training necessary to perform their role.** While IPSA regulations contribute to rigid role definitions, many staff express a desire to expand their skills beyond their current responsibilities.

"I want to have a go at everything, things like casework, campaigning, as well as what I'm currently doing. I want to see how policy, debates and things can result in actual change for people's lives."

Despite the wide range of duties across different roles, several interviewees reported a lack of role-specific training for key functions such as casework, office management, and research.

At its best, technology could be a powerful enabler for staff, allowing them to automate routine tasks, surface insights from casework data, and collaborate more effectively across locations. But this potential is rarely realised. Very few offices offer proactive digital training, and most rely on informal learning or trial and error. Staff are often keen to innovate but lack the time or permission to experiment. By investing in clearer digital workflows, shared best practice, and peer-led learning, Parliament could help staff feel more capable, confident, and in control of their tools.

Some interviewees noted the need for more technical onboarding to tools like Caseworker.mp or to changes in parliamentary procedure:

"Caseworker and PRS I'd never come across before so a colleague sat me down on Teams and showed me how to use it, our office lives on Caseworker."

"I think some processes have changed here since I last worked in Parliament... you would table questions on a piece of paper and now there's an online system. Or to speak in a debate, you used to call the Speaker's office and now there's an email."

OFFICIAL TRAINING RESOURCES AND COURSES ARE DISPERSED AND OFFERED AT MANY DIFFERENT LEVELS

Formal training and support for MPs' staff exists and is often highly valued, but it is dispersed across multiple teams, platforms, and levels, making it difficult to navigate and uneven in its impact. The support landscape is rich but fragmented: high-quality training and expertise exists, but without clearer signposting, coordination, or integration into everyday workflows, access depends heavily on individual awareness, timing, and initiative rather than being a consistent part of staff development.

Parliament does offer some formal training, and where it exists, feedback is generally positive. One interviewee recounted a strong experience on a formal management training course:

"I had no managerial training in the beginning, have done formal training now, a pilot from the House of Commons that was spread over several months... accredited by the Chartered Management Institute. The course was absolutely brilliant."

They also appreciated access to shorter, focused courses:

"I just did a small segment on recruitment and interviewing. It came at a very timely moment, four days before our recent interviews. It was really useful."

In addition to training, staff use a wide range of resources within Parliament to support their day-to-day roles. These include the House of Commons Library, HR services, and procedural experts:

"House of Commons Library is an amazing resource, what they don't know isn't worth knowing. They've got a massive amount of briefings and fact sheets."

"In-house HR team are amazing-you can ring them for quick answers or set up a Teams meeting."

"The House Authority is really helpful."

"House of Commons Library subject specialists are brilliant."

The [Members' Services Team \(MST\)](#) was established in 2020 following the [Bullying and Harassment of MPs' Parliamentary Staff Independent Inquiry Report](#) authored by Gemma White KC, and provides HR support and pastoral care for Members' staff. In **September 2022, over 100 Members approached the team, raising 199 individual cases.**

"Since the establishment of the Members' Services Team in April 2020 there has been an increasing willingness from Members to engage with the service... I've used the team myself and found them to be very helpful in situations I would have otherwise not been qualified to deal with."

– MP Thangam Debbonaire

MST publishes employment guides and offers regular workshops on topics including appraisals, sickness management, grievances, recruitment, and office restructuring. However, uptake remains limited:

"The establishment of the Members' Services Team means that Members now have access to a range of best practice employment guides and the opportunity to attend regular workshops. The take-up of these appears to be limited, however."

– MP Thangam Debbonaire

The MST also engages directly with Members' staff by making contact when new staff accounts are created, offering phone-ins, and signposting support services.

Staff often turn to external digital platforms for parliamentary information or guidance:

"Work for MP - written a lot of that myself. We offer that to people as guidance. Parliamentary intranet is not as good as it could be."

"Policy Mogul is a brilliant website... You can search by people, topic, area-it produces a bit of a digest."

"The website W4MP, that explains everything. I know that's a good resource."

"I also use 'They Work For You' a lot, which is funny because I work for them. It's great to see what everyone's said."

STAFFERS RELY ON MENTORSHIP FROM COLLEAGUES TO FILL TRAINING GAPS

Experienced staff frequently fill the gap in formal onboarding by training new colleagues:

"Having a caseworker background was great but there was still a huge learning curve. I had a really good team and I learnt a lot from them."

"A lot of the training we give new starters will come from myself and the caseworker."

"You can't prepare a colleague for every eventuality, so use real examples and walk them through what to do next."

"At the time, there was another caseworker in the constituency who was really helpful in getting to grips with things."

While peer mentoring plays an important role in helping new staff get up to speed, reliance on experienced colleagues to deliver core training creates uneven and fragile onboarding. The quality, scope, and accuracy of training depend heavily on who happens to be in post, their capacity, and their own understanding of parliamentary processes. When experienced staff leave, much of this tacit knowledge leaves with them, making each new starter's experience highly variable rather than reliably supported.

While this kind of peer learning plays a crucial role in office culture, it also points to a lack of consistency in onboarding and training.

"Over time you specialise, for example a colleague who is very good at parking tickets."

"We have two younger members of the team... I am old, so I know a lot and have a lot of life experience."

In the absence of consistent formal training, staff often rely on one another:

"I know one person (Office Manager) with an interest in wellbeing and I'll go to her with queries. Our best resource is each other."

"I do find other offices to be quite friendly and quite helpful. Knowing people rather than going somewhere 'official' for help."

"It's quite interesting to compare notes and see how other offices operate, it can be quite an eye-opener."

Some parties have started formalising these informal networks:

“The Lib Dems have a buddy system for interns... went for a coffee with someone who had been here a lot longer.”

OFFICES OPERATE IN ISOLATION FROM ONE ANOTHER

A recurring theme across interviews was how isolated offices felt, both from each other and from wider institutional support. Staff described few structured opportunities to compare practices, learn from peers, or understand how other offices approach similar challenges. As a result, teams often operate as self-contained units, developing their own ways of working with limited reference to shared standards or collective learning across Parliament.

This isolation reinforces uneven quality and slows improvement. While informal conversations with peers can be valuable, reliance on ad-hoc networks means access to learning depends on who staff happen to know, rather than being systematically available. Several interviewees noted that opportunities to compare notes were most likely to arise through in-person training or chance encounters, both of which have diminished as training has moved online. Staff consistently reported that seeing how other offices operate was useful, highlighting how much potential learning is currently lost in a system where offices function separately rather than as part of a connected institution.

“It’s hard to compare because we are a little bit like an island and we don’t have that much contact with other offices. We typically might just meet other people on training courses, except that now they’re held on Teams, we miss that face-to-face element. It’s quite interesting to compare notes and see how other offices operate, it can be quite an eye-opener.”

CONCLUSION

Taken together, these findings point to a staffing and skills system that is highly constrained, heavily informal, and unevenly supported. MPs’ offices operate under acute capacity pressure, shaped by limited budgets, public scrutiny of expenses, and the absence of a clear institutional staffing model that reflects the scale and complexity of the work now expected of them. In this context, recruitment and training are often treated as risks to be minimised rather than investments to be made.

Recruitment into MPs’ offices is uneven and frequently lacks structure and transparency. While platforms such as W4MP play an important role, many roles are still filled through informal networks, personal inboxes, or ad-hoc processes managed

via spreadsheets. Training provision mirrors these dynamics. High-quality support exists across Parliament, but it is fragmented, inconsistently taken up, and poorly integrated into everyday office life. As a result, staff development depends heavily on individual initiative, timing, and informal peer support. These findings align closely with IPSA's recent proposals to professionalise MPs' staffing through competency-based pay, clearer progression pathways, and the introduction of a senior leadership role within offices. However, our research suggests that without parallel investment in recruitment support, onboarding, and management capability at office level, these reforms risk improving pay structures without addressing the operational conditions that drive turnover.

More formalised guidance, shared competencies, and practical recruitment resources, such as assessment templates and interview protocols, could help professionalise hiring and improve equity across offices. Similarly, the introduction of standardised recruitment software across Parliament, such as applicant tracking systems (ATS), could streamline recruitment while raising standards of fairness, transparency, and consistency. Structured shortlisting workflows, anonymised CV review, and templated interview processes would support offices to run more inclusive and robust recruitment rounds, even under time pressure.

Crucially, such systems would also enable Parliament to gather aggregate data on recruitment patterns, diversity metrics, and access barriers. This would support better oversight of workforce trends and allow targeted interventions to build a more representative and resilient parliamentary workforce. Without a more coherent, system-wide approach to staffing, recruitment, and training, one that recognises MPs' offices as complex public service organisations rather than small personal teams, current pressures are likely to deepen, with long-term consequences for staff wellbeing, retention, and democratic effectiveness.

SECTION 5

TECHNOLOGY & SOFTWARE

OFFICES CANNOT IMPROVE WITHOUT ACCESS TO GOOD TOOLS AND SOFTWARE

Since 2020 MPs have paid for over 275 different kinds of software tools, with them purchasing 34 different video editing tools alone.

Technology plays an increasingly central role in how MPs' offices operate, communicate, and manage growing volumes of constituent engagement. Since 2020, MPs spending on software rising sharply in recent years, including a 64.5% increase in the last year alone. This reflects both the expanding demands placed on offices and a willingness among staff to experiment with digital tools to meet them.

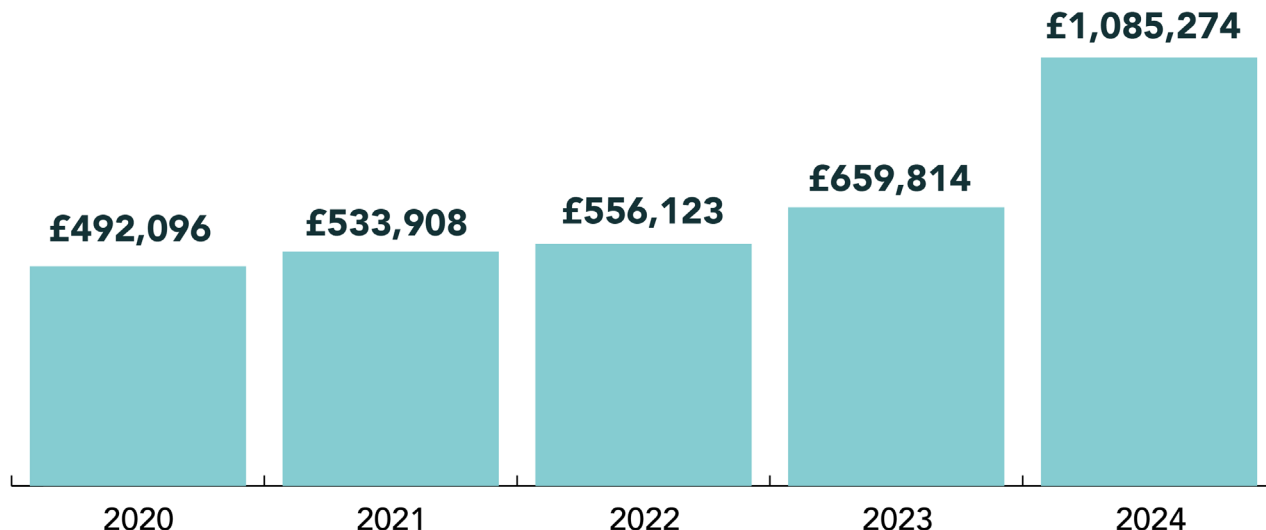
However, technology use across Parliament presents a mixed picture: investment is uneven between offices, heavily concentrated in communications and content production, and shaped by a constrained systems environment governed by central security and access controls. While some offices invest heavily and innovate around these constraints, others rely almost entirely on basic, centrally provided tools.

The result is a fragmented technology landscape in which significant spending and creativity coexist with limited automation, inconsistent practice, and unrealised potential to use technology more strategically to improve efficiency, resilience, and democratic responsiveness. This section explores how offices might make the best use of technology and procure it effectively.

SOFTWARE SPENDING IS INCREASING OVERALL, BUT VARIES WIDELY BETWEEN OFFICES

Overall spending on software is going up over time. In 2024 it went up by 64.5%.

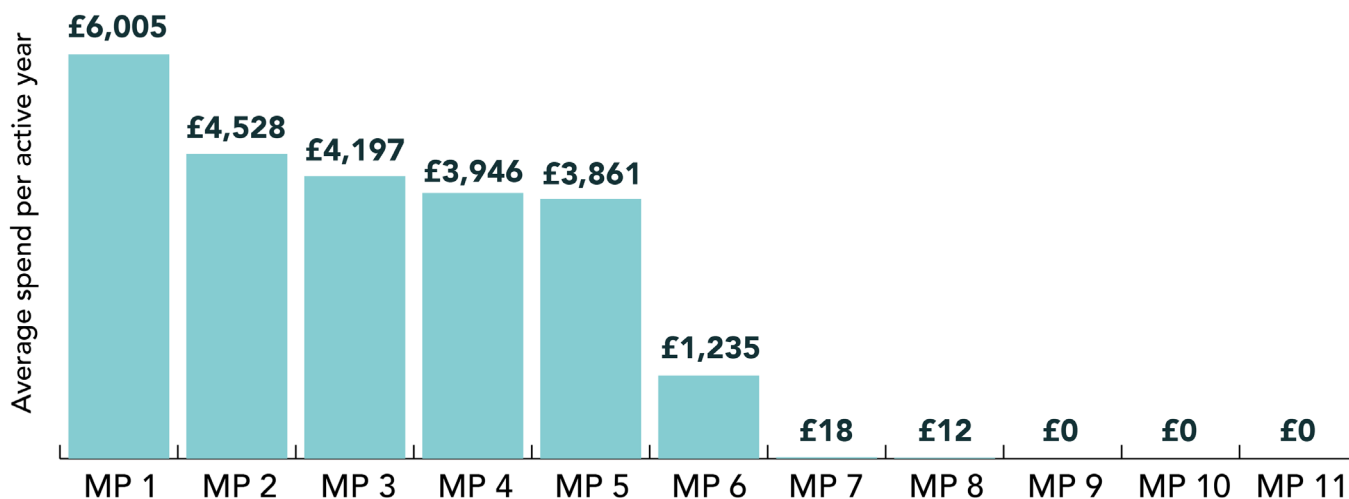
CHART 4
TOTAL SPEND ON SOFTWARE OVERTIME



Yet there are notable disparities in spending patterns. A minority of MPs allocate substantial resources to software, significantly exceeding typical expenditure levels. Specifically, the highest spender averaged over £6,000 annually, while the next four top spenders ranged between approximately £3,800 and £4,500 per year, with figures far surpassing the general average spend of £1,235.

Conversely, a considerable number of MPs spend minimally on software, with five of the lowest spenders showing negligible or zero expenditure, suggesting that a subset of offices either do not prioritize software investments or rely solely on basic tools provided centrally.

CHART 5
COMPARISON OF LOWEST AND HIGHEST SPENDERS ON SOFTWARE 2022-2025

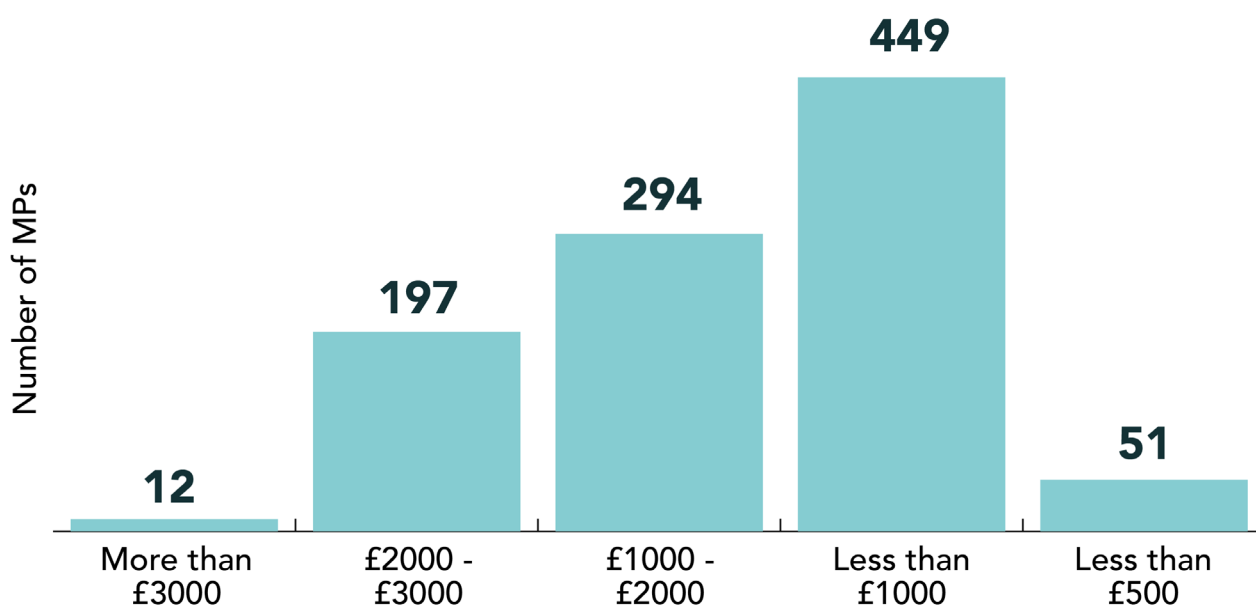


Further categorisation of MPs' software budgets illustrates that most MPs (449) maintain relatively modest spending levels of under £1,000 per year. A moderate segment (294 MPs) invests between £1,000 and £2,000 annually, and fewer (197 MPs) spend between £2,000 and £3,000. Notably, high annual spending - over £3,000 - is rare, recorded by just 12 MPs.

These findings indicate significant variability in technology adoption and possibly reflect different operational priorities or resource allocation strategies among MPs' offices. It underscores opportunities to explore whether higher investment in technology correlates with operational efficiency, better constituent engagement, or improved internal management, and whether lower spenders could benefit from targeted support, training or advice regarding effective software use.

CHART 6

NUMBER OF MPS VS AVERAGE YEARLY SPENDING ON SOFTWARE



SECURITY AND ACCESS CONTROLS CONTROLLED BY PDS RESTRICT OFFICES

Security and access controls managed by [Parliamentary Digital Services \(PDS\)](#) can create a restrictive environment, which some staff members find challenging when trying to efficiently perform routine tasks or integrate new tools. PDS controls which software and digital tools are approved for use, but staff highlighted a lack of clarity and transparency about this approval process. Offices reported difficulties understanding what tools are permitted or how to request access to new software, limiting their ability to innovate or customise their workflows effectively.

"I wish that we weren't hamstrung so much by PDS and 'best organisational practices' that prevent MPs using far better tech to respond to their constituents."

Several interviewees mentioned security procedures and access limitations related to managing shared inboxes, calendars, and virtual meeting platforms. Permissions were sometimes unclear or not straightforward, causing delays or disruptions in workflow. While the importance of robust security protocols is recognised, frustrations arise when these controls impede day-to-day operations, restrict flexibility, or hinder quick adaptation to changing circumstances:

"Permissions - not 100% sure how things work, her email gives her access to the [Member] email without having to log in as it. She just sees the inbox."

"Trying to sort Zoom and things at the moment - had to ask digital support for help setting up her account, and getting permission to schedule things on behalf of [Member]."

"For scheduling, the person whose calendar it is needs to give you permission to schedule on their behalf and see their calendar."

AUTOMATION IS UNDERUSED

These constraints also help explain why automation remains underused in MPs' offices. While many routine tasks, such as inbox triage, diary coordination, meeting scheduling, and information routing, could in principle be partially automated, security and access controls limit staff's ability to configure systems in this way.

Permissions are centrally managed by Parliamentary Digital Services (PDS), and staff often lack clarity over what access they have, what tools are permitted, or how to request approval for new software or integrations. As a result, offices tend to rely on manual workarounds rather than building automated processes that depend on shared access, delegated permissions, or system-to-system connections.

Although robust security is widely recognised as essential, the combination of restrictive defaults, opaque approval processes, and limited configurability reduces flexibility and discourages experimentation. It makes it difficult for offices to adopt even modest forms of automation that could improve efficiency and resilience in day-to-day operations.

A small number of teams reported they implemented inbox rules or tagging systems in Outlook.

"Mass policy emails will automatically be assigned to a policy worker."

Microsoft Outlook is central to email management within MPs' offices, and staff have leveraged some automation and customisation features like filters, QuickSteps, and integrations with the Caseworker system to streamline processes.

"Automated a process around those - set up filters in outlook that will move certain emails straight over to the database."

"QuickSteps function in Outlook is a click of a button to send things."

There was some acknowledgement in our interviews that much could be automated with staffers saying the biggest waste of time in the job included:

"Having to do various repetitive process because there's no alternatives (e.g. uploading emails to cases - could easily be automated)."

"Having to repeat things over and over!"

RESTRICTED SYSTEMS LIMIT INNOVATION AND USABILITY

MPs' offices operate within a highly constrained systems environment, with only a small number of centrally approved tools available for core functions such as casework, correspondence, and records management. While this standardisation is intended to support security and compliance, it has the effect of limiting choice, competition, and innovation.

Offices are often required to work around tools that are widely perceived as clunky, inflexible, or poorly aligned with how staff actually work, with few viable alternatives available. The absence of an open or competitive market for parliamentary office systems means there is little incentive or opportunity for new entrants to develop better, more user-centred tools, or for existing systems to evolve rapidly in response to user needs.

For example, the [IPSA](#) system is used for managing expenses but is criticised for being inefficient and challenging to navigate, although [improvements are underway](#). One interviewee mentioned using the IPSA system for expenses management, describing it as "clunky" and "not very intuitive."

"I am also my MP's IPSA proxy, that can be a pain and the system is clunky. I know that's being looked at but it's not very intuitive, it doesn't flow very well."

Similarly, [Caseworker.mp](#) is the only casework management tool with permissions to link to the MPs' inbox and thus has a monopoly within Parliament and MPs' offices with nearly £2.3 million being spent on the software over a 5 year period. Many interviewees expressed frustrations with its limitations and lack of user-friendliness.

"The awfulness of Caseworker - it would not be tolerated for 5 minutes in [the] private sector."

"It is generally third-rate compared to systems I used and commissioned in the private sector."

"Caseworker could do with a lot of improvements - it's alright, it's expensive, I used to use [CFL caseworker](#) and when we first got caseworker we thought it was the bees knees. There are things in it that are not terribly user friendly..."

Staff consistently described Caseworker as functionally limiting and inefficient, with usability issues that compound already heavy workloads. Common frustrations included unreliable email ordering (particularly around time changes which can result in missed correspondence), frequent and unpredictable log-outs due to over-zealous security settings, and a user interface that is widely seen as clunky and unintuitive.

The system offers limited search and categorisation functionality, with no effective way to search by case type, ward, or postcode, and cumbersome workflows for navigating search results. Staff also highlighted major barriers to bulk processing and reporting: attachments cannot be added to bulk emails, large mail merges must be manually broken down and cleaned in spreadsheets, and exporting or printing cases for Subject Access Requests is difficult or impossible. Poor integration with Outlook and other everyday tools further increases duplication of effort, requiring staff to manually upload emails to cases. Taken together, these limitations mean that routine administrative tasks take significantly longer than necessary, data is harder to manage or analyse, and opportunities for automation or strategic use of casework information are largely foreclosed.

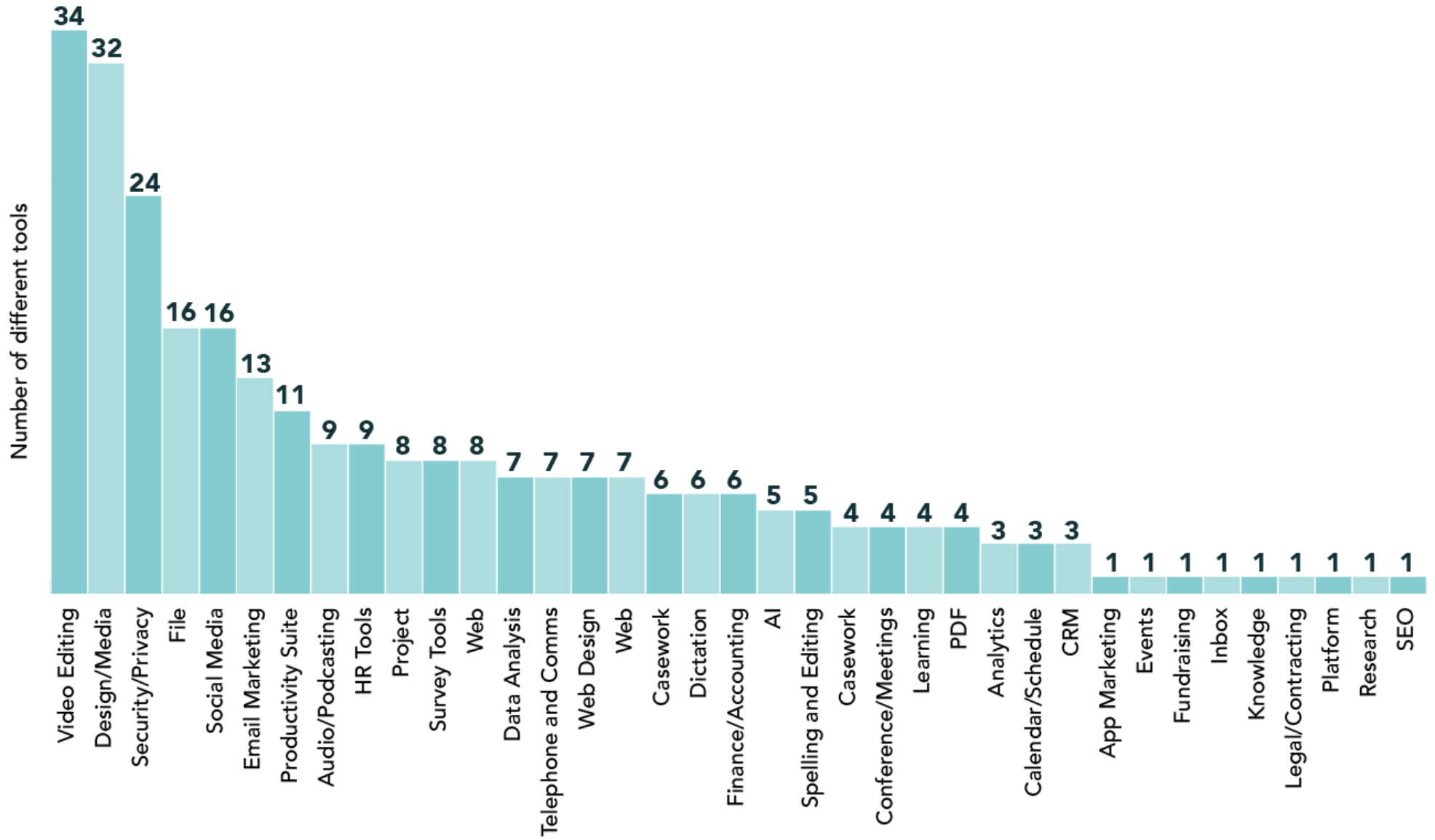
MPS OFFICES HAVE A CREATIVE BUT FRAGMENTED APPROACH TO SOFTWARE

MPs' offices make wide and creative use of digital tools, but this activity is highly fragmented and largely unguided. Security restrictions on parliamentary devices mean that staff rely heavily on cloud-based software, yet there is little central direction on what tools to adopt, how to use them, or how different systems should fit together. As a result, technology choices are often made at the level of individual offices or staff members, shaped by immediate needs rather than shared standards or long-term strategy. Over the past five years alone, MPs' offices have collectively paid for at least 275 different software tools, pointing to both ingenuity and systemic fragmentation (see appendix for full breakdown). There are 34 different video editing software tools being used by MP staffers, 31 different design packages, 16 different cybersecurity tools, 16 different cloud storage software, 13 different social media content planning tools, 11 different email marketing platforms and 9 different audio/ podcasting tools used.

Taken together, this landscape points to a missed opportunity. MPs' offices are already spending significant sums on digital tools and demonstrating a willingness to experiment, but the absence of shared standards, procurement pathways, or analytical infrastructure means this experimentation rarely compounds into lasting capability. Instead, knowledge about what works remains local, informal, and vulnerable to staff turnover. Without clearer guidance, coordination, and support technology use risks continuing to grow in volume without delivering corresponding gains in effectiveness, resilience, or democratic responsiveness.

CHART 7

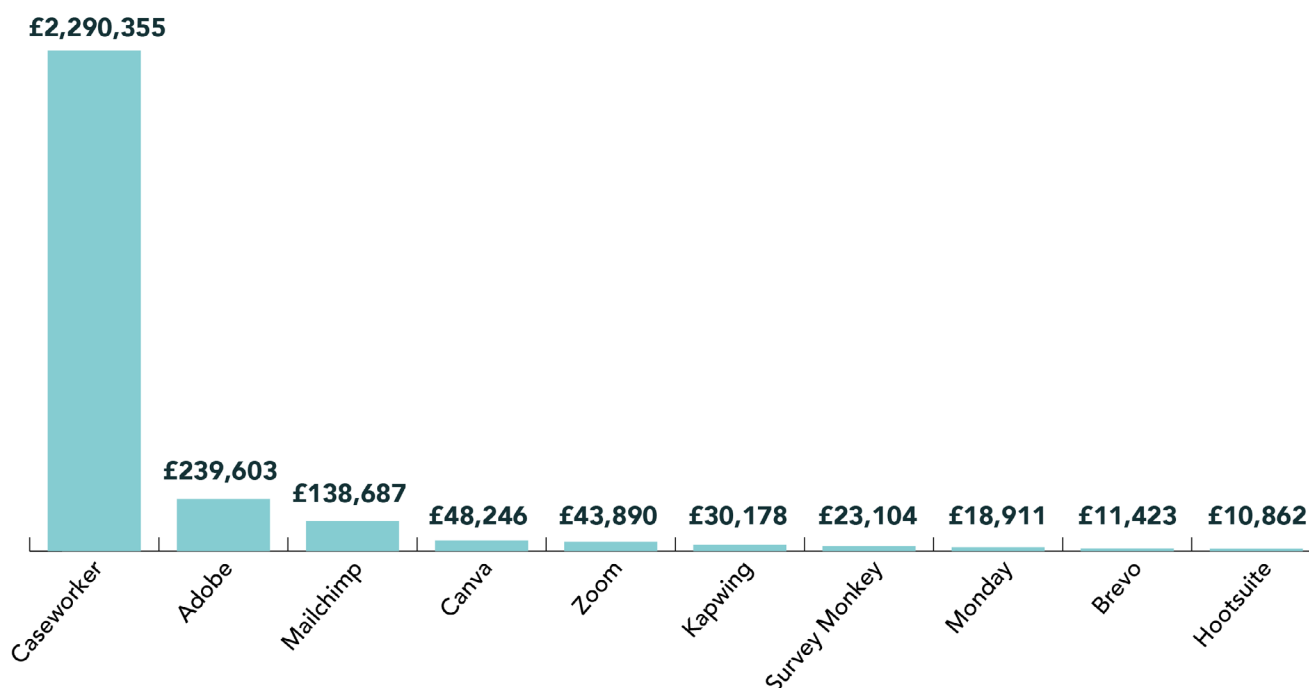
NUMBER OF DIFFERENT SOFTWARE TOOLS PAYED FOR BY FUNCTION: 2020-2025



When it comes to spending, MPs over the past 5 years have spent the following amounts on each of the following software companies:

CHART 8

SPENDING ON DIFFERENT SOFTWARE COMPANIES 2020-2025



All figures are drawn from an analysis of <https://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-staffing-business-costs/annual-publications>

PRIORITISATION OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS WHEN IT COMES TO SOFTWARE

The distribution of spending across various software products provides an indication of what kinds of activities are prioritised by MP office teams. Based on the data available, the main software needs are for engagement with constituents, through casework, email marketing or social media content.

Technology adoption in MPs' offices is particularly concentrated in communications and media production. Analysis of IPSA business costs shows extensive use of tools for graphic design, video editing, social media management, email marketing, and digital publishing, with dozens of different platforms used across offices for similar purposes (see Appendix). This reflects the growing expectations on MPs' offices to maintain a constant public presence across multiple channels and to respond rapidly to news cycles, constituents, and online audiences.

Several interviewees highlighted their office's strong focus and prioritisation on engaging with constituents and maintaining effective communication channels, using available technology where appropriate. Offices leverage various tools like Mailchimp, Buffer, and website platforms (e.g. WordPress) to manage newsletters, press releases, social media scheduling, and online presence.

"For social media scheduling we use a platform called Buffer, we all take part in social stuff, can all go into the platform and see what's happening and approve each other's stuff."

"Mailchimp for newsletters and press releases...We send a monthly newsletter, not very long, which will highlight things the Member had done that month."

"We might mention things [in newsletter] like X number of people wrote to us about 'banning XL American Bullies' - when we send out an individual response to casework or mass emails we will include a link to stay up to date by signing up to the newsletter."

"Try to have a balance of clips of the Member speaking, party graphics, retweeting posts from other front benchers, general picture from drop-ins, and events in the constituency and then reactive stuff like in response to a current news headline."

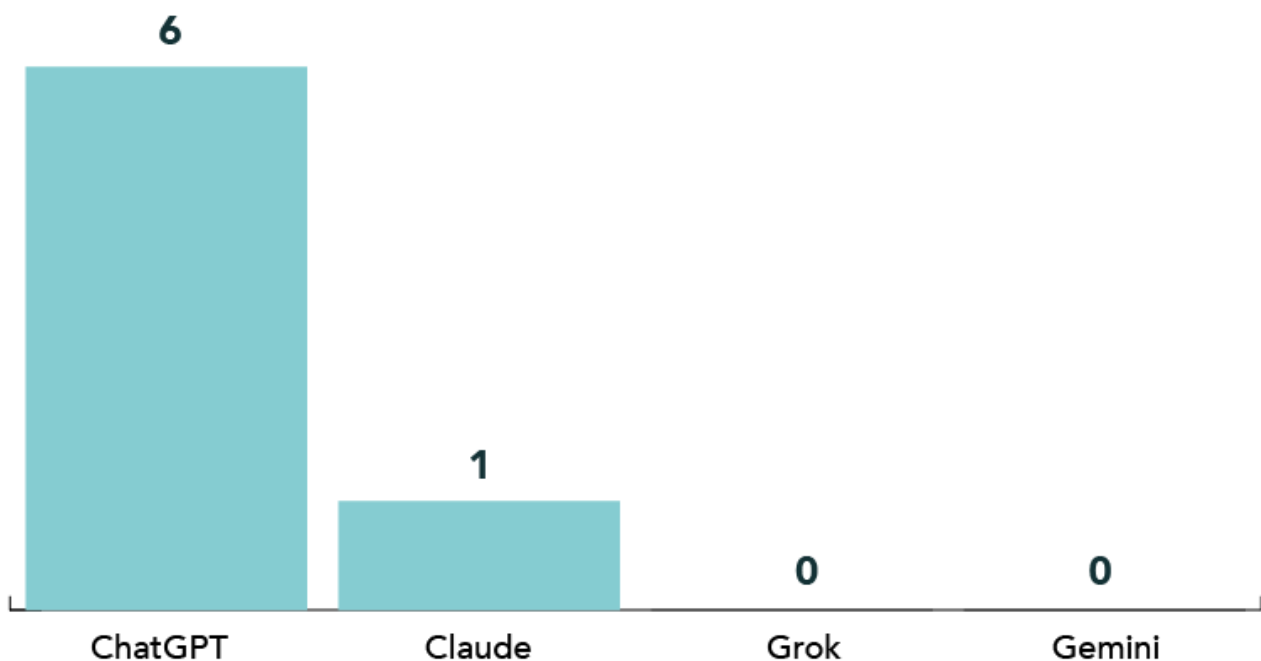
"We use mailchimp for monthly newsletters and press releases."

OFFICES ARE NOT USING AI EVEN WHERE IT IS NOW ACCEPTED PRACTICE

Limited uptake of spending on AI tools suggesting this is an area which can be significantly leveraged. Currently only 7 MPs (roughly 1% of MPs) at the time of publication, claim for any kind of AI tool with one MP claiming for both Perplexity and ChatGPT. This suggests that this toolset is being used in a limited way currently within offices.

CHART 9

SPENDING ON AI MODELS IN 2024-2025



The current picture is one of fragmented tools and frustrated potential, but it doesn't have to be this way. With clearer workflows, smarter procurement, and shared best practice, MPs' offices could harness technology to dramatically improve both efficiency, impact and the knock on democratic outcomes. Given the rapid growth of AI, this is a highly promising area to explore.

However, any adoption must be balanced with strong attention to security. AI tools offer significant potential to improve efficiency and support staff, whether integrated within the Office 365 ecosystem or via external platforms. Parliament could even consider developing a bespoke model tailored to its specific needs. There is a huge potential for developing tailored tools that directly support the realities of parliamentary work, whether through shared templates for correspondence and casework responses, integrated dashboards showing workloads, deadlines, and case trends, AI assistants to help draft constituent emails or summarise complex policy briefings and secure systems for managing internal knowledge, handovers, and office continuity.

These aren't abstract ambitions, they are entirely achievable with off-the-shelf technology and a commitment to coordinated design. Such changes in the base foundational elements detailed in this section unlock and improve access to resources in related areas and systems across Parliament and the democratic system.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this chapter shows that MPs' offices are not short of technology or willingness to use it, but are constrained by fragmentation, uneven investment, and a restrictive systems environment. Significant sums are being spent, often creatively and in good faith, yet without shared standards, clear procurement pathways, or the ability to integrate tools effectively, this spending rarely compounds into durable capability. Security and access controls play an important role in protecting parliamentary systems, but in their current form they also limit automation, inhibit innovation, and lock offices into tools that many staff experience as clunky or poorly aligned with how they actually work. The result is a landscape where routine tasks remain manual, data is hard to analyse, and staff rely on workarounds rather than systems designed to support them.

This does not reflect a failure of ambition at the office level, but a missed opportunity at the system level. With clearer guidance on best practice, more transparent approval processes, and a shift towards treating technology as shared democratic infrastructure rather than a discretionary add-on, MPs' offices could unlock substantial gains in efficiency, resilience, and responsiveness. Emerging advances in AI offer real potential to reduce administrative burden, improve insight from casework, and support better decision-making, provided they are introduced with appropriate safeguards and coordination. By treating technology not as an afterthought but as core infrastructure for democratic work, Parliament could reduce duplication, ease pressure on staff, and create the conditions for technology to genuinely strengthen democratic representation rather than merely keeping pace with demand.

SECTION 6

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT & ANALYTICS

OFFICES CANNOT IMPROVE OVER TIME WITHOUT DATA AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

73% of staff surveyed had no written guidance, handbook or instructions for how things are run in their office.

"Every time someone leaves, half the knowledge goes with them."

"No one's ever asked us to look at trends in casework, we're just putting out fires."

MPs' offices handle an immense and diverse flow of information, from urgent casework and complex policy queries to national campaign emails and shifting party lines. Yet this knowledge is rarely captured or shared. With no centralised training, minimal documentation, and high staff turnover, most learning happens through trial, error, and oral transmission. Despite this information rich environment, most offices operate without robust systems for organising, sharing, or learning from the knowledge they generate. This is both within individual offices, and across offices collaborating or sharing knowledge together.

With no centralised training, minimal documentation, and high staff turnover, most learning happens through trial, error, and oral transmission. In this section, we explore the consequences of weak knowledge management. Resources like the Parliamentary Research Services and more informal communities of practice such as W4MP and staffer WhatsApp groups are a good start but need more investment and development. This dependence on goodwill and personal networks reinforces inequality between offices and limits the extent to which learning can accumulate at a system level.

Information is routinely captured, but rarely consolidated, analysed, or reused. Existing tools are largely configured for record-keeping and compliance rather than learning, while analysis is seldom embedded in job design, recruitment, or everyday workflows. Where analytical or knowledge-building work does occur, it is typically ad hoc, fragile, and dependent on individual initiative rather than institutional support.

As a result, offices operate reactively: responding to immediate pressures, relearning the same lessons, and struggling to anticipate emerging issues or allocate resources strategically. While some teams have done their best with the tools available to them - Caseworker.mp, SharePoint, spreadsheets - to stay organised, knowledge management is often informal, inconsistent, and highly dependent on individual initiative. Institutional memory can be fragile, processes undocumented, and data underused. Staff described learning on the job, building their own tracking systems, and struggling to access key information when responsibilities shift. This section explores how offices are managing knowledge day to day, what's working and where it sometimes falls short.

THOUGH THERE IS SOME OFFICIAL PARLIAMENTARY ONBOARDING IT IS A STEEP LEARNING CURVE

While Parliament has introduced more [formal induction efforts](#) in recent years, these too vary in quality. Several interviewees described the steep learning curve they faced when starting their roles, particularly in understanding parliamentary procedures, terminology, and the unique work environment.

"It was really difficult when I started to get my head around it all. It's like nothing else, it's such a different environment."

"I do remember starting out being like learning a foreign language - even now I still struggle with a lot of the terminology around e.g. the Whip arrangements, or knowing the times [Member] will need to be in Parliament for voting."

"The most difficult aspect of the job was the procedural issues at Westminster and the way the Parliament worked in general."

SPECIFIC ONBOARDING PROCESSES ACROSS DIFFERENT OFFICES VARY WIDELY IN QUALITY

Onboarding experiences varied widely. While some staff described structured induction and resources, others relied almost entirely on learning from colleagues. Many interviewees described office-specific onboarding processes, which varied in formality and comprehensiveness.

A common theme across many interviews was the need to learn on the job, often with support from experienced colleagues. This was particularly true for those who joined offices without extensive prior experience.

"When I started, there was no formal onboarding or training. You had to learn as you went along."

"At the time, there was another caseworker in the constituency who was really helpful in getting to grips with things and telling me what we should be doing."

"A lot of the training we give the new starters will come from myself and the caseworker, because we have a lot of prior experience."

"Came to visit in July before things started, to meet the team and see where the office was and meet the outgoing grad. Helped understand things a bit more."

Others pointed to the absence of formal handbooks, training, or standard templates. Staff often relied on intuition, improvisation, or support from colleagues. There was also a strong awareness that lack of knowledge management systems were a significant problem.

"Processes aren't passed down. You just learn by asking people or doing it wrong."

"It was really difficult when I started to get my head around it all. There just isn't that sort of structure here."

"A lot of our knowledge is institutional and just sitting in our heads."

"Every time someone leaves, half the knowledge goes with them."

In some rarer cases, interviewees described more thorough onboarding processes showing some evidence that knowledge is documented, stored and shared with new arrivals often through handbooks or documents:

"Received a ~100 page handbook, detailing internal office processes, relevant constituency contacts, and other relevant information."

"We have an extensive employee handbook which sets out the MP's position on different things and how to operate as a frontbencher."

"In terms of induction to the office - I already knew what the functions of the role would be, so it was more about how this office works. We have an employee handbook that I read through, from the Member's office. It's similar to any handbook I've had at other orgs - things like policies, TOIL etc."

ATTEMPTS TO CREATE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS ARE INCONSISTENT ACROSS OFFICES

While there is some recognition of the importance of documenting processes and sharing knowledge internally, efforts are inconsistent. A few offices described using SharePoint or OneNote to build shared knowledge systems and improve access to speeches, files, and templates.

SharePoint is also used selectively for knowledge sharing and documentation, enabling staff to centralise resources and share valuable information.

"Because things are shared on SharePoint - If someone does some training, will upload to SharePoint so everyone can benefit."

"We have a team SharePoint that we all use a lot, and MP has just introduced something the Parliamentary Digital Team have just done training for... This is great for sharing files with the team and live doc and amendments."

"If someone does some training, will upload to SharePoint so everyone can benefit."

"We're not keeping paper records, MP is keen on a paperless office."

"Use SharePoint, OneNote for communal access to speeches and things and also sending key tasks to other Members."

Whilst these are good signs, some offices described these systems as piecemeal and inconsistent. One respondent explained:

"[I] will tag subject i.e. transport - but won't set dates, or assign people. We use it for filing and to send direct emails to government departments."

Similarly, there are still many offices which do not seem to have this in place, with one staff member saying the one thing they wished their office did differently was

"Using Sharepoint or a similar platform to share notes, documents and files so that everyone can access and pick-up where needed."

In other cases, staff had developed their own custom systems. "Spreadsheets for if we get campaign correspondence. We will create a list of everyone writing in, so we can make sure we send out a mail merge to everyone."

"In the Member's inbox the team all have their own subfolders so I can see exactly what everyone's working on at any one time."

"I've created our own tags, I'm building a knowledge hub in OneNote, just trying to bring some organisation."

INFORMATION IS STORED WITHOUT SHARED STRUCTURE OR STANDARDS

In particular there is a real lack of understanding for the need for structure or naming systems and their role in accessing information. In practice, this reflects a fundamental gap in information infrastructure rather than individual capability. Many offices lack shared conventions for structuring, naming, or organising information, meaning that knowledge is stored in personal inboxes, desktops, or ad hoc folders rather than in accessible, collective systems.

Without consistent naming standards, tagging practices, or agreed locations for policy and casework material, information becomes difficult to find, store, and access, particularly in the high-pressure, fast-moving, and often chaotic environments in which MPs' offices operate. This fragmentation makes it harder to respond quickly and consistently to constituent concerns, increases reliance on individual memory, and undermines collaboration across teams. Over time, it also limits offices' ability to build institutional memory, identify patterns, or carry learning forward as staff change roles or leave, reinforcing reactive ways of working and further constraining analytical capacity.

"There's no structure around data or policy knowledge... It's just wherever you save it, your inbox or desktop."

"We don't even have a consistent naming system for files or emails."

One staffer in particular said one of the most frustrating parts of the job was:

“Re-writing databases because they have not been shared and nobody can access.”

RESHUFFLES EMPHASISE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

These challenges described above, are not confined to individual offices or the result of poor internal practice. Rather, they reflect a system-wide absence of shared knowledge infrastructure across Parliament. This weakness becomes most visible during periods of transition, particularly following reshuffles, when staff move roles, responsibilities shift, and offices are expected to adapt quickly.

Information, guidance, and institutional memory are largely held within individual offices or even individual staff members, with few mechanisms for structured sharing, handover, or collective access between teams. When roles change, knowledge does not reliably travel with the work. Instead, it fragments across inboxes, personal files, and informal networks, leaving offices to reconstruct context and processes from scratch. As a result, reshuffles and staffing changes are especially disruptive. Staff frequently reported difficulties accessing up-to-date information following role changes, exposing the limits of informal, person-dependent knowledge systems in a complex and fast-moving parliamentary environment:

“When there’s a reshuffle, overnight you go from being an advisor on one very niche issue to potentially a huge and wide-ranging international position that you might have no experience or knowledge of. You’re thrown in at the deep end, the Member had to speak at questions on the topic less than a week after inheriting it - and we are still trying to figure out what the party position is. It feels like everything lives in people’s brains.”

“That is the challenge - dissemination of information, that it’s not as available as it could be. The logistics and service don’t seem up to scratch with the House, waiting on things for so long, things like when Parliament is going to prorogue, we can’t do any planning till that’s confirmed.”

SOME VALUABLE SHARED INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE EXIST OUTSIDE OFFICES

Some knowledge management is done externally to offices and Parliament through services provided by the party such as the Parliamentary Research Service or Parliamentary Research Unit which are paid services. Often this is focused on policy knowledge management which is needed for casework. Similar research services are also provided by the House of Commons Library.

Staying informed about the party’s stance on various policy issues, especially during reshuffles or when taking on new briefs, was cited as a significant challenge due to a lack of accessible, up-to-date information. The absence of a centralised, up-to-date resource makes it hard to provide accurate and consistent information to constituents. This is a key area where technology could help. The [Parliamentary Research Service \(PRS\)](#) was consistently referenced as a key source for

policy information by those we interviewed. One interviewee mentioned a OneNote-based policy database, as a workaround for the lack of a centralised database. Whilst the PRS caters for Labour MPs, the Conservative Party runs a similar service - the [Policy Research Unit](#).

"We do use the PRS but the Member doesn't love those responses so we will personalise and change them up quite a lot."

"I think, genuinely, it's knowing the party line on things. That just feels impossible to navigate - I know PRS has started something that's like a policy database based in OneNote. They've shared a link to that but it's not very thorough."

"When you take on a new frontbench role, [the previous MP doesn't] need to keep or share any docs with the newcomer."

[Policy Mogul](#) is also mentioned as a newer cross party tool helping offices handle policy-related inquiries and correspondence. This service is free and uses AI technology to keep up to date, however it lacks the party specific relationship that PRS or the Parliamentary Research Unit have, and as a result lacks access to internal briefings and party intelligence.

Similarly lots of more operational knowledge exists in staff maintained resources like the website W4MP and through networks of staffer WhatsApp groups. In the absence of formal mechanisms for cross-office knowledge sharing, staff have developed informal communities of practice, such as staffer WhatsApp groups, union branches, staff associations, and platforms like W4MP, which play a crucial role in disseminating best practice, answering urgent questions, and helping new or transitioning staff navigate unfamiliar responsibilities. While these networks are widely relied upon and highly valued, they operate largely on unpaid, voluntary labour and personal goodwill, with limited support or resourcing, despite their significant value.

OFFICES HAVE LITTLE ANALYTIC CAPACITY

Despite handling large volumes of information every day, from casework records to digital communications, most MPs' offices make little routine use of data analysis to inform their work. Casework systems and social media platforms are primarily used for logging activity, responding to individual enquiries, or maintaining an online presence, rather than for identifying patterns, shifts in sentiment, or emerging issues over time.

Staff are rarely asked to analyse data, few offices hire for analytical or data science skills, and learning generated through day-to-day casework or constituent engagement is often lost or rather than institutionalised. This gap is reinforced by formal role expectations: official IPSA job descriptions prioritise data protection and administrative record-keeping, with only limited, high-level references to analysis and no explicit requirement for analytics capability, insight generation, or the use of analytical systems. As a result, most offices operate reactively, responding to immediate demand rather than using data from casework or digital channels to anticipate pressures, allocate resources, or systematically understand what constituents are raising most often. This limits not only operational efficiency but also democratic responsiveness, reducing offices' ability to recognise emerging concerns, respond proportionately to constituent needs, and reflect local priorities accurately in MPs' decision-making and public voice.

ANALYSIS AND DATA SKILLS ARE NOT PRIORITISED IN RECRUITMENT

Across the official IPSA job descriptions for MP staff (2025–26), references to “data” are frequent but narrowly framed. The vast majority relate to administrative record-keeping and compliance with data-protection legislation, such as managing files, logging cases, and handling information confidentially. Only a small number of responsibilities refer to analysing or interpreting data, typically expressed in high-level terms such as “analysing patterns of enquiries” or “interpreting data to inform the MP”, with no specification of tools, methods, or analytical outputs. Notably, no role explicitly requires data analytics capability, insight generation, or the use of analytical systems, highlighting a gap between the growing complexity of MPs’ workloads and the formal expectations set out for staff roles.

DATA ANALYSIS / INTERPRETATION

- “Analyse patterns of enquiries and produce reports.”
- “Analyse, evaluate, and interpret data to ensure the MP is accurately informed on key issues and is aware of trends.”

These appear in job descriptions for **senior research roles**, and are high-level statements without defined analytical standards or tooling.

DATA MANAGEMENT / RECORD-KEEPING

- “Database management using office software (e.g. Microsoft Office) to handle administrative cases.”
- “Efficient data and file management to ensure the office complies with the data protection legislation.”
- “Ensure records are kept and information managed confidentially in line with the data protection legislation.”
- “Ensure records are kept and information managed confidentially and in line with the Data Protection Act.”
- “Retain records and information confidentially and in line with the Data Protection Act.”
- “Log all cases; monitor progress and ensure all identified actions are taken.”

These appear in **caseworker roles**, and are focused predominantly on data protection compliance.

REPORTING / EVIDENCE

- “Ensure that all cases and decisions are properly documented, writing clear concise reports containing analysis of the evidence, explanation of the findings and conclusions, and a robust and appropriate action plan.”
- Prepare and present results for the purposes of briefing notes for committees, parliamentary questions, articles and press releases.”

These focus on **documentation and reporting**, rather than analytical capability.

(Source: IPSA MP Staff Job Descriptions and Pay Bands for 2025-26. https://assets.ctfassets.net/s90k6prbkeee/7h9BV0yFEqj4iXbR6fHOUz/bad08020fbd66351baf5acaf307e11ee/MP_staff_JDs_spreadsheet_2025-26.pdf)

CASE MANAGEMENT TOOLS HAVE SOME ANALYTIC CAPABILITY BUT SYSTEMS LIKE TAGGING ARE UNDERUSED OR USED INCORRECTLY

Efficiently managing casework is hugely important to the teams we spoke to, and in the majority of offices they are using spreadsheets or caseworker.mp software to do so. Dedicated software, tagging and attributing cases, and establishing workflows helps teams to stay organised and on top of their caseloads.

[Caseworker.mp](#), has some limited systems in place for tagging and tracking cases. The software does allow for some kind of tracking and analysis and data compliance but there are limited attempts to export the data and do any deeper analysis.

"We use Caseworker.mp, office manager will pick up all the incoming post from various mailboxes, will see the responses from the team and what is coming in to the team etc."

"We're good at keeping on top of casework, we're strict on data protection and keeping data tidy."

"Professionalism - the speed with which we respond to people, the way we do. We have a process and we know where a case is in that process."

"Don't consciously track anything - know there's the reporting facility on caseworker so we're quite careful about how we tag cases. So we can pull together things like how many cases we've had regarding a particular issue for MPs reference."

"Reporting - casework and policy stuff goes into the database. We all have access to the diary so everything goes in there. We don't do a lot of tracking. The database we use tracks the casework for us."

Practices around tracking and reporting progress also varied considerably. Many teams used their casework systems to tag and log cases, mainly to monitor progress of cases, but few described regular reviews of patterns. The lack of infrastructure for standardised tagging, analysis, or reporting means most data use remains limited to closing cases or producing basic outputs.

"We don't consciously track anything"

"We do not currently analyse constituent contact data, we only tag it to close cases."

"No one's ever asked us to look at trends in casework, we're just putting out fires."

"I do a monthly breakdown of what issues are coming in, just in a spreadsheet."

"We only ever look at themes when it gets really bad or there's a crisis."

One way in which some analysis is done is for the purpose of publicly sharing the impact of the work of the MP. Some offices reported using casework visualisations or publishing updates online:

"We have pie charts, various infographics on the website that show the proportions of casework, the top issues in the constituency, the newsletter that goes out updating on the Member's activity."

Some of the teams we spoke to went further, analysing their records to identify recurring themes and flagging important trends to the MP. *"We've just started tagging our casework, hoping it helps spot patterns over time,"* said one staffer. Another explained, *"I do a monthly breakdown of what issues are coming in, just in a spreadsheet."* Yet, for many offices, tagging and structuring information remained superficial, and data analysis was largely ad hoc and driven by individual staff initiative rather than institutional process.

Many teams are innovating informally, developing tags, spreadsheets, and workflows on their own, but without coordinated systems, institutional support, or time to reflect, this work risks being lost with every staffing change.

CASEWORK DATA IS NOT ANALYSED FOR STRATEGIC INSIGHT

While this is a promising approach, these limited insights don't yet inform staffing decisions, resourcing. Despite handling large volumes of information, few MPs' offices use structured data analysis to inform their work. Time, training, and infrastructure constraints mean most teams operate reactively rather than proactively. Many staffers recognise the value this kind of analysis could bring and how it may improve the functioning of many offices:

"I've created some tags for common issues, but we don't use the data proactively."

"I tried to do a dashboard but it's hard to get clean data out of the system."

"If the MP had a better idea of what issues were most common, we could be more strategic."

"It would be helpful to have a simple dashboard or report-e.g. how many people have raised housing this month."

There is also a recognition that data isn't used to provide wider collective insights over time or even aggregated over areas to get some sense of national trends. There is some recognition of this among staffers with interviewee recognising the missed opportunity of pooling data as the potential for insight through data remains vastly underused:

"I wish there was a way to pool data across offices to see national trends."

"There's no central place where you can say 'this is the top 5 things people contact us about' across MPs."

OTHER TYPES OF DATA ANALYSIS ARE RARE AND AD HOC

Some offices also were beginning to monitor social media metrics. With lots of new ways for MPs to engage with their constituents, channels like social media provide more opportunities for engagement and contact.

"We are looking at socials at the moment, especially Facebook as we've got a big drop-off in reach."

Having a framework for analysing these interactions and using social media to better understand sentiment offers interesting opportunities. With the developments in AI driven qualitative research and analysis, this is clearly an area which is wide open for greater development.

In many ways AI-based analysis offers a credible route to addressing the longstanding analytics gap in MPs' offices but only if it is deployed as supportive infrastructure rather than a substitute for human judgement. Many AI analysis also requires proper data plumbing and structuring to be put in place which means hiring for people who understand the need for this. Without clear standards, transparency, and staff ownership, there is a risk that AI simply adds another layer of complexity or obscures accountability. Realising the benefits of AI analysis therefore depends less on technological sophistication than on governance, training, and integration into everyday workflows, ensuring that insights remain interpretable, contestable, and ultimately accountable to the MP and their constituents.

CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrates that weaknesses in both analytics and knowledge management are not peripheral operational shortcomings, but interlocking structural constraints on the effectiveness, resilience, and democratic capacity of MPs' offices. Despite operating in information-rich environments, generated through casework, correspondence, digital engagement, and policy work, most offices lack the time, skills, systems, and expectations required to turn information into either durable knowledge or actionable insight.

Addressing these challenges will require more than the introduction of new software or analytical tools. It demands clearer standards and expectations for how information should be captured, shared, and analysed; investment in analytical and knowledge-management capability; and the deliberate integration of learning into everyday work. Practical interventions could include shared naming and tagging standards, collaborative digital handbooks, structured onboarding and handover processes, and tools that allow staff to surface patterns across casework and correspondence rather than simply process them one-by-one.

Staffers are clearly resourceful and do their best to make systems with familiar generic tools like sharepoint or spreadsheets, yet they could be using dedicated modern software that is designed for these purposes and can integrate intelligently - relationship management, casework management systems, knowledge management systems, team password management systems, automated documentation tools. These tools used in most modern workplaces by operations specialists would result in better services, more efficiency, better use of knowledge and better continuity.

With these foundations in place, emerging approaches such as AI-supported analysis, offer the potential to support offices in moving from “putting out fires” to building a systematic understanding of constituent concerns and operational pressures. More fundamentally, strengthening knowledge and analytics systems would allow MPs’ offices to shift from a model in which knowledge disappears with people to one in which learning accumulates over time, improving continuity, reducing pressure on staff, and enhancing the quality, consistency, and accountability of democratic representation.

CONCLUSION

This report is the story of how thousands of staffers in MPs' offices across the country, work to underpin and reinforce the British democratic system, on a daily basis. These democracy workers diligently work to respond and resolve local issues, acting as a signpost and critical stopgap for stretched local services. They equip our elected representatives with the information and analysis they need on a daily, minute-by-minute basis, to better represent their constituents in the democratic chamber and in the halls of power. MPs' offices, the processes they use and the technologies they employ, are of fundamental importance to the health of UK democracy.

MPs' offices are the hidden infrastructure of our democracy, yet they are stretched, fragmented, and built on systems never designed for the scale or complexity of the modern constituency workload. This report reveals a system that relies too heavily on the personal resilience of individual staff, with little institutional support, few shared tools, and almost no space for strategic learning. The result is not just inefficiency, it is emotional burnout, wasted public funds, and missed opportunities to better serve communities.

Reform of Parliament's digital and office infrastructure is both necessary and achievable. Improving how MPs' offices are resourced, trained, and connected is not simply a matter of workplace fairness; it is fundamental to democratic integrity. Many of the changes required are relatively straightforward and could deliver rapid improvements in efficiency and effectiveness, such as clearer role definitions, better onboarding and training, and more consistent use of shared tools. Other reforms will require longer-term coordination with bodies such as IPSA and the Parliamentary Digital Service, including reforms to job frameworks, funding structures, and core systems. **Together, these changes represent a practical and realistic route to a more trusted, effective and locally grounded Parliament. If we want a better democracy, we must invest in the people and processes that make that possible behind the scenes.**

Together, these changes represent a practical and realistic route to a **more trusted, effective and locally grounded Parliament.**

If we want a better democracy, we must **invest in the people and processes** that make that possible behind the scenes.

APPENDIX

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To comprehensively address our research questions, we employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Our methodology consisted of four main components: system mapping, interviews, a survey, and a literature review.

System Mapping

We began by developing a detailed system map of the processes and structures involved in the functioning of MPs' offices. This map was based on our initial understanding of the key elements and relationships within these offices. We then invited a select group of current and former office staff to participate in 60-minute workshops, where they reviewed and added to the system map. This process allowed us to refine and validate our understanding of the complex systems at play in MPs' offices.

Interviews

A central component of our research was a series of in-depth interviews with key stakeholders. We conducted 60-minute interviews with 10 staff members currently employed by an MP. These semi-structured interviews explored participants' experiences, challenges, and best practices related to setting up and running an MP's office, with a particular focus on the use of technology. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and insights.

Survey

To complement the qualitative insights from our interviews and gain a broader perspective on the practices and experiences of MPs' offices, we conducted an online survey. The survey was designed to capture quantitative data on the prevalence of specific challenges, practices, and technology use across a larger sample of offices. We received 35 responses to our survey. The survey data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify significant trends and relationships.

Literature Review

In addition to our primary data collection, we conducted a comprehensive literature review to situate our findings within the broader context of research on parliamentary practices and the use of technology in political offices. The literature review helped us to identify existing best practices, comparative case studies, and theoretical frameworks that informed our analysis and recommendations.

Throughout the research process, we adhered to strict ethical guidelines, ensuring participant confidentiality and obtaining informed consent for all data collection activities. Our methodology was designed to provide a robust and multi-faceted understanding of the current state of MPs' offices, with a view to identifying actionable insights and recommendations for enhancing their work through the effective use of technology and other best practices.

Scope & Limitations

This is a qualitative research project focused on insight and pattern recognition rather than statistical generalisation. MPs' offices are small, independent workplaces and can differ significantly based on the MP's style, party, and location. While the sample does not capture every variation, it includes staff from a wide range of roles and office types. The report is best read as a window into the challenges and adaptations shared by many - and a starting point for broader conversation about how we support the people behind our democracy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The setup of a new office

- What guidance are new MPs given on the setting up of their office?
- Who helps and advises them? What resources are available?
- What staff will they have supporting them? How will they find and hire new staff?
- Which functions or aspects of the office do they most struggle with setting up?
- What do they see the function and purpose of an MPs office as being?
- What happens when an office closes?

Onboarding staff

- What recruitment processes were used to recruit staff?
- What process and resources do offices use to onboard new staff?

What do people struggle with?

- Which aspects of the work do office staff find most difficult or challenging?
- Are there areas which seem inefficient or time consuming?
- What do they wish they'd known, in the beginning (of the office or their role)?

Best practices

- What processes, tools or approaches are offices employing that work well?
- How have they found ways to increase efficiency or save time?
- What do they feel they do particularly well in their role or office, and why?

Resources and platforms

- What resources do they use to help them in their day to day role?
- What resources did they use to help them when they were new in the role
- OR setting up the office?
- Where would they turn to now if they needed help with something?

Scope for change

- What scope is there to recommend new solutions or ways of working?
- How can we ensure the project team works on solutions that would be welcome?

SYSTEM MAPPING PROMPTS AND CATEGORIES

For our system mapping exercise, we divided inputs and outputs into four major categories and used the prompts below to help map out activity.

Finances & Assets

- What finances and assets come in to the office?
- Where do they come from, and by what mechanism?
- How are finances and assets managed by the office?
- What processes or tools are used to do this?
- What finances and assets leave the office, and how is this managed?

Information & Communications

- What information comes in to the office?
- Where does it come from, and by what mechanism?
- What information is managed by the office, and how?
- What processes or tools are used to do this?
- What information leaves the office, and how is this managed?

People

- Which people come in to the office?
- Where do they come from, and by what mechanism?
- How are people managed within the office?
- What processes or tools are used to do this?
- What happens when staff leave? How do they approach handovers?

Permissions & Accesses

- What finances and assets come in to the office?
- Where do they come from, and by what mechanism?
- How are finances and assets managed by the office?
- What processes or tools are used to do this?
- What finances and assets leave the office, and how is this managed?

TOOL ANALYSIS

All figures are drawn from an analysis of <https://www.theipsa.org.uk/mp-staffing-business-costs/annual-publications>

AI				
Anthropic	Dobrowser	Google Minutes Ai	Openai	
ANALYTICS				
Qr Generator	Qrfy	Bitly		
AUDIO/PODCASTING				
Acast Podcast	Audible Uk	Buzzsprout	Cleanfeed	Epidemic Sound
Mtech	Soundcloud	Splice	Streamyard	

CALENDAR/SCHEDULING				
Calendly	Flexibits Diary	Doodle Enterprise		
CASEWORK				
16 Casework	Casetracker	Caseworker	Highrise Casework	
CASEWORK RESOURCES				
Benefits calculator	Entitledto	Grants Online	Language Line	
Lawdepot	QuickBenefits Calculator			
CONFERENCE/MEETINGS				
Gotomeeting	Powwow Now	Whereby	Zoom	
CRM				
Insightly Crm	Kumu	Zoho		
DATA ANALYSIS				
Access	Canary	Grids	Hinternet	Stata
Toolkit Conservatives	Westminster Analytics			
DESIGN/MEDIA				
Adobe After Effects	Adobe Creative Cloud	Adobe Express	Adobe Illustrator	Adobe Indesign
Adobe Premiere	Adobe Stock	Affinity	Alamy	Serif Europe
Artlogo	Befunky	Canva	Capture One	Creativemark
Freepik & Flaticon	Global Delight	Illustrator	Indesign	Indieground Design
Istock	Lensa Ai	Lucidpress	Marq	Photoshop
Shutterstock	Solopress	Wondershare	Envato	Issuu
DICTATION				
Apple Dictation	Nuance	Otter.Ai	Plaud Uk	
Dragon Dictation	Speakit.Info			
EMAIL MARKETING				
Action Network Toolset	Authsmtp	Brevo	Campaignmonitor	Contstant Contact
Email Blaster	Email Renewal	Sendpulse	Quadiant Uk	Sendinblue
Emailoctopus	MailChimp	Mailjet		
EVENTS				
Eventbrite				

FILE STORAGE/CLOUD				
Data Senduk	Apple Cloud Storage	Livedrive Backup	Aws Emea	Cloudways
Digitalocean	Drop Box	Easeus	Google Cloud	I Cloud
Parallels	Rackspace	Wetransfer	Winzip	Data Senduk
FINANCE/ACCOUNTING				
Charge	Paddle Paddle	Paypal	Paypro	
Sage	Zettle			
FUNDRAISING				
Agoodthing				
HR TOOLS				
Absentia	Bluetree	Breathehr	Bright Hr	Charliehr
Hunter	Testgorilla	Timetastic	Health Assured	
INBOX MANAGEMENT				
Ereceptionist				
KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT				
Evernote	Scribe			
LEARNING				
Blinkist	Cali	Help.Skillshare		
LEGAL/CONTRACTING				
DocuSign				
PDF				
Adobe Acrobat	Foxit	llovepdf	Pdfsam	
PLATFORM				
Agm	Appsumo			
PRODUCTIVITY SUITE				
Corel Word	Google Gsuite	Google Play Apps	Hemingwayapp	Microsoft Office
Pushbullet	Remarkable	Rocket Book	Windows	Nchsoftware
Notion Labs				
PROJECT MANAGEMENT				
Asana	Basecamp	Monday	Productivity method	Slack
Tameday	Todoist	Trello		
RESEARCH				
Scite	Perplexity			
SECURITY/PRIVACY				
1 Password	Nord VPN	Arlo	Avg Technologies	Bitdefender Antivirus

Bitwarden	Dashlane Dashlane Pre	Expressvpn	Intego	Kaspersky
Lastpass	Logmein	Malwarebytes	Mcafee Anti Virus	Mod Vpn
Keeper Security	Netshade	Yubikey	Nord	Webroot
Norton Antivirus	Pixsy	Protectstar	Roboform	
SEO				
Yoast				
SOCIAL MEDIA				
Buffer	Content Studio	Feedly	Hootsuite	Later.com
Linktree	Loomly	Planable	Pocket	Postcron
Search Point Uk	Sendible	Sprout Social	Linkedin	Postplanner App
Press Reader				
SPELLING AND EDITING				
Grammarly	Prowritingaid	Quillbot	Textexpa	Weglot
SURVEY TOOLS				
Jotform	Smartsurvey	Surveyhero	Surveymonkey	Surveysparrow
Typeform S.L	Videoask	WP Forms		
TELEPHONE AND COMMS				
Soho66	Vonage Phone			
Airlandline	Beonline Voip	Bt Conferencing	Circleloop	Sipgate
VIDEO EDITING				
After Effects	Animoto	App Autoque	Apple Final Cut	Biteable
Capcut	Caption Pro	Captioning	Clideo	Clipchamp
Descript	Film Simplified	Headliner Video	Kapwing	Motionarra
Promo Standard Plan	Promptsmart	Raiveon	Rev	Screencastify
Blackmagic Cloud	Cyberlink	Motionden	Techsmith	Camtasia
Movavi	Typito	Zeemo.Ai	Zubtitle	Youtubepremium
Veed	Vimeo	Wavve.Co	We Video App	
WEB DESIGN				
Buttermountain Qr Code	Carrd	Cms.Scot	Elementor	Fardesign
Squarespace	Wordpress	Wix		
WEB HOSTING/DOMAIN				
Fasthosts	123Reg	Cookiebot	Godaddy	Ionos Cloud
Lcn Com	Tsohost			

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