

74th Westminster Seminar

The 74th Westminster Seminar hosted by CPA UK took place from the 9th of March to 13th March 2026.

The theme for this year's event was "Effective Parliaments".

By Sunday 8th March all 63 invited delegates along with some of the CPA hosting committee were all booked in at the Wellington by Blue Orchid in St Vincent Square London.

Day 1 started early at 07:30 with registration in the lobby of the hotel. After a hearty breakfast we were taken by coach, which was to be a regular event for the seminar, to Portcullis House, UK Parliament. Once through security the delegates were invited by Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP, Speaker of the House of Commons, to light refreshments ahead of the Commonwealth Day Flag Raising ceremony, of which the highlight was Mrs. Connie Johnson Deputy Speaker along with Senator Sheena Pitts read an extract from the poem "The House of the Commonwealth".

Around 10:30 that morning the official seminar procedures began in "The Attlee Suite" with the Welcome and Introduction to the program led by Sarah Dickson OBE. Chief Executive CPA UK. In this opening session we were made aware AI and the use of social media and how it can be ingrained into politics wisely.

The first invited speaker of the day was the inspirational Rt Hon. the Baroness Scotland of Asthal KC. The takeaways from her speech was knowing "initiatives that work and those that does not work", that, "Democracy is not static", knowing, "True prosperity is in opportunity", and that "Transformation works for people not against them" and I think that the last one, is one we as a Council can use, which was, "we must define what we have in common".

After the daily hot lunch was served in "The Attlee Suite" we were escorted by foot to Westminster Abbey for the annual Commonwealth Day Service of Celebration attended by the Royal Family and dignitaries. This was a packed event including a speech from former Spice Girl Geri Halliwell-Horner and a performance from the Royal Ballet School.

On day 2 we were treated to a guided tour of UK Parliament preceded by a group photo taken on the stairs of Westminster Hall.

After the tour, session 1 for the day was on Parliament systems across the Commonwealth with the focus on unicameral (which St Helena operates under and is a type of [legislature](#) consisting of one house or assembly that legislates and votes as one) and bicameral systems.

Session 2 was on the role of the Speaker presented by the Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle Speaker of the House of Commons. The session was based on the duties of the Presiding Officer and explored the differences and similarities in their responsibilities in different commonwealth legislatures and the importance of impartiality in the role. My key takeaways were; how can I make an impression during my term, speak as soon as you can as it gets easier to do as you grow in the role, to have more than one objective, to work together not in silo and the most important to me was to be seen in your district. He also spoke to mental health issues with elected members and to remember that in parliament it takes years to get things done, which can affect your health.

74th Westminster Seminar

Session 3 for day 2 was another interesting session presented by Daniel Greenberg on privileges, standards and behaviour in Parliament. This session was for parliamentarians to recognise that they are entrusted with significant privileges and responsibilities and are expected to uphold high standards of integrity and accountability.

Takeaways: standards is a system that can be trusted. Scandals are great because you know about them and it means that they were investigated and the findings released. Social media is a new tool and whilst it gives you an opportunity to listen you can use it to gain trust, noting that the pressure on politicians on social media is unreasonable. He also pointed out that we must do more to publicise the good. And most importantly we have a right to private life, but criminal behaviour is not private.

Quote of the session “the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference”.

The day was rounded off with an opportunity for delegates to share their views on what they learned from day 2.

Day 3's first session was on holding the executive to account. In this session delegates were to discuss good practices, challenges and innovative approaches in ensuring accountability, transparency and effective scrutiny of the executive branch.

In this session we were told not to make a commitment in public and then we cannot carry it out, and that voters can hold ministers to account for commitments made on their manifestos.

An interesting topic in this session was on Post legislative committees. This is to see if the laws passed, works.

The highlight of the day was being chosen to view Prime Ministers Question time. For an hour we got to watch how parliament works in real time, and it was great to see Speaker Hoyle controlling what from the outside would look like a shouting match.

Another session on day 3 was on Members using Parliamentary resources effectively for scrutiny. The session covered practical strategies for accessing and managing parliamentary tools, such as research services, procedural advice, committee support and external expertise to assist with the inquiry process.

The last session on day 3 was an interactive session on Leadership and communication skills for parliamentarians. Key tips to take away from this was, when speaking practice your first two sentences especially if you speak too fast, and when speaking ignore the voices in your head. When speaking reassure yourself that you know your subject and to be confident in your delivery. Also, it is important not to make the person you are asking the question of, to make them look small.

We were questioned on what you want the audience to remember when we ask a question in the house. My answer to this was that I want the audience to feel my passion and urgency in the questions I ask. It was also important to me that the person who I question of, feels that I am someone they can work with rather than be seen as an obstacle.

74th Westminster Seminar

Key Takeaway. Key principles when building a speech. Start with a hook to grab their attention. Storytelling is king. Use statistics to add weight but remember the human scale principle. (relatable touchable and recognisable)

Quote of the day “if I look at the mass, I will never act. If I look at the one I will”. Mother Theresa.

The day was rounded off with an evening reception by permission of the Speaker in the state room where the new CPA UK strategy was launched.

Day 4. Session 7 was based on Parliamentary work through a diversity, inclusivity and gender-sensitive lens. One key message in this for me was that as legislators the best we can do is walk in someone else's shoes. We must advocate for human rights (gender based). Childcare in relations to women in parliament was addressed. It was noted that Canada allows indigenous language to be used in parliament. Strengthening assets for disabilities was addressed. Another tip in this session was about speeches, when speaking, do not become, or allow yourself to become monotonous as that is boring.

What was disappointing was that we speak out against violence against women but if we speak about gender equality it should be about violence against your partner.

The last session of the day was on exploring AI. This was on how we can use it in parliament. It opened with 2 AI clips that was fake. One was supposed to be Sarah Dickson OBE and the other was Kate Osamor MP Chair of the CPA UK Executive committee. We were informed that AI is here to stay and is moving at speed. And that the capability of AI is that it doubles every 7 months.

A key AI tool mentioned in relations to the Hansards was Parlink. So, I am hoping that this is a tool we can use going forward.

Day 4 ended with the those of us who were to spend the next day in Leeds catching a train from London. On arrival we walked from the station to the hotel across the road. It was cold and wet.

Day 5 hosted by the Lord Mayor Alex Sobel started with a hearty breakfast, then it was time to brave the cold, at least it was not raining.

The day began with a visit to a primary school where we learned about budget constraints, gang activities happening just outside the school and their biggest issue which is immigrant children not speaking English or joining the school halfway through the school year, this is because Leeds is one of the places most immigrants head for because of its diversity. We then met two students from the University of Leeds who were from the Commonwealth. They both spoke to adapting to the climate as they were from Nigeria and the culture. We were given a brief overview on what they were studying and how they both were to return home once their studying were finished.

After a tasty Indian lunch at the Tharavadu restaurant it was off to the Rainbow Junction charity mission. The mission of this charity is to tackle food poverty, fight food waste and build community.

After a long cold day, it was time to catch the train back into London.

Officially the seminar was finished.

74th Westminster Seminar

As a participant of the 74th Westminster seminar I would like to thank the CPA UK team for hosting what was an excellent event. From day one to day 5, I can honestly say this was an experience that will shape me as a parliamentarian.

Hon Denis Leo, MLC