

MALDIVES

Public Accounts Committee Scrutiny Workshop



6 - 12 November 2021

CONTENTS & OUTCOMES

IMPACT, OUTCOMES & OUTPUTS

Impact

Through the exchange of good practice, discussions and a range of workshops, this programme aimed to contribute towards a more effective and efficient Public Accounts Committee in the People's Majlis, Maldives.

Outcome

PAC Chairs, members and clerks have enhanced technical skills to scrutinise and hold government to account, including:

- 1) increased confidence in effective questioning during oral evidence hearings
- 2) increased knowledge to draft and follow up effective reports and recommendations
- 3) Strengthened networks and contacts further across Asia and in the UK, particularly within the CAPAC community

Outputs

- 1) A two-and-a-half-day workshop attended by at least 10 PAC members and clerks
- 2) Delegates enhance their knowledge and understanding of PAC scrutiny
- 3) A post-programme report is produced and shared with key stakeholders as well as published online
- 4) Shared learning and tools are added to the CAPAC portal to facilitate continuing learning across the Commonwealth

UK Delegation

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP
 Dame Meg Hillier MP
 Richard Bacon MP
 Bradley Albrow
 Rebekah Northall
 Sonu Masania

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PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

In November 2021, Maldives became the first legislature in Asia to receive a CPA UK delegation since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The visit was one of many firsts and re-invigorated relationships with parliaments in Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. It was also the first ever in person meeting of the Chair (UK) and Vice-Chair (Maldives) of the Commonwealth Association of Public Account Committees (CAPAC).

At the 2019 CAPAC Asia Workshop in Kuala Lumpur, three delegates attended from the Maldives including the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Hon. Mohamed Nashiz MP. During the Workshop, Hon. Nashiz participated in a simulated committee hearing exercise. Upon his return to Maldives, **Hon. Nashiz MP quickly utilised the learning from the CAPAC Workshop and changed how the Maldives PAC conducts its work.** Maldives' PAC is unique in that it can change its standing orders relatively easily and quickly. Following this, he invited CPA UK to deliver a PAC Scrutiny Workshop for PAC members in the People's Majlis, recognising the value of shared learning between parliamentarians, clerks, and officials.

From 6 – 12 November 2021, a six-member CPA UK cross-party delegation of members, clerks, and officials from the UK Parliament visited the People's Majlis in Maldives.

Alongside a two-and-a-half day PAC Scrutiny Workshop, the visit included meetings with the British High Commission in Malé, H.E. the Deputy Speaker, the Maldives-UK Friendship Group, and members of the Opposition Party.



CPA UK & MALDIVES

CPA UK has engaged regularly with the People's Majlis in the Republic of The Maldives since they re-joined the Commonwealth on 1 February 2020. The Maldives PAC is an active member of CAPAC after joining in early 2021. As well as being a member of the Association, Maldives' PAC Chair, Hon. Mohamed Nashiz MP, took up the position of Vice-Chair of CAPAC in March 2021.

COUNTRY PROFILE: THE REPUBLIC OF THE MALDIVES

Population: 540,542

Area: 300 sq km; 1,200 islands (mostly uninhabited)

Capital: Malé

Languages: Dhivehi

Major religion: Islam

Joined Commonwealth: 1982, withdrew in 2016, re-joined in 2020

Head of State: President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih



UK - MALDIVES TRADE

Trade between the UK and Maldives was of particular interest to the UK delegation, especially as Maldives is largely reliant on imported goods which have decreased during the pandemic. In the year from July 2020 to June 2021, the total trade in goods and services between the UK and the Maldives was £134 million.

The top five goods exported from the UK to Maldives include chemicals, clothing, ships, and electric motors. The top goods imported to the UK from Maldives include fish and shellfish and scientific instruments.

The bilateral visit to Maldives was the first CPA UK visit since August 2019 and the first since Maldives re-joined the Commonwealth. It was also the first in person meeting between the Chair (Dame Meg Hillier MP) and Vice-Chair (Hon. Mohamed Nashiz MP) of CAPAC, strengthening valuable relations between the UK and Maldives even further.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives, is the unicameral legislative body of Maldives. The Majlis is composed of 87 members and is opened in February each year by the President of Maldives. Around 50 MPs are under the age of 45 (59.8%).

GENDER BALANCE

Women have been represented within the Maldivian Parliament since the 1970s, however equal representation remains a challenge. Currently, four women are members (4.6%), a reduction from the five that were elected in the previous Parliament.

The gender disparity is attributed to several factors, including the volatile and violent political landscape, online and social media harassment and low levels of confidence and willingness to apply from women candidates.

Although there are several committees that do not include any women parliamentarians, including the Budget and PAC Committees, committees of the People's Majlis must include at least one woman member. This requirement places an additional burden on the four women parliamentarians who are in office. Women parliamentarians in Maldives report being **oversubscribed and over-capacity as they sit on several Majlis committees.**

The People's Majlis is actively looking at ways to promote women's representation at Atoll Council levels in the hope that this will translate into greater representation at national parliament level.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ATOLL COUNCILS)

Under the 2008 constitution, the function of local government is devolved to an Atoll Council to administer each atoll and an Island Council to administer each inhabited island.



Island councillors are elected by the people of each island, and the Atoll Councillors are in turn elected by the Island Councillors.

Devolved services on each inhabited island vary. Some islands have a local school (primary and secondary education) and medical centres for basic medical care. These medical centres were crucial in administering COVID-19 vaccinations to the Maldivian population. However, for more serious medical concerns requiring specialist care or equipment, patients must be transferred by boat to larger hospitals in the capital, Malé.

There is **growing demand from Maldivian citizens to de-centralise public services** away from Malé. The current Government is exploring options to group islands into regional hubs and to introduce regional public services (such as hospitals) so that residents do not have to travel to Malé to access public services.

Inhabited islands in Maldives are currently powered by large diesel generators and some host costly desalination plants to extract fresh water from the sea. While there are discussions around moving away from polluting diesel motors to green alternatives, it is unclear when this transition may begin.



SECURITY

On 6 May 2021, the Speaker of the People's Majlis, H.E. Mohamed Nasheed MP was injured by a bomb attack outside his home. The Speaker spent time in intensive care and travelled to Europe for surgery following the terrorist incident. Police have since linked the attack to Islamic extremism and arrested three men in connection with the attack. The Speaker returned to parliament in October 2021 but was overseas during the CPA UK visit.

The radicalisation of young people and Islamic extremism is a real and current concern in Maldives. It is estimated that over 173 Maldivians have travelled to Syria and other conflict zones as of December 2019 .

Social problems, gang crime and high rates of drug use are believed to have contributed to the radicalisation of young men. Since Maldives' economy largely depends on tourism, inactivity and unemployment due to the impact of the pandemic may also be exacerbating the problem. Like the UK's PREVENT programme, Maldives has a programme of early intervention and rehabilitation schemes to prevent the radicalisation of young men.

CLIMATE

Low-lying Maldives is highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change. Parliamentarians routinely report on the erosion of islands and the bleaching of corals. Maldivian islands are reportedly changing shape as they continue to be influenced by the changing currents of the Indian Ocean around them.

While no islands have been lost to rising sea levels due to climate change, islands have been lost to natural disasters. **The tsunami in 2004 destroyed 14 islands and displaced nearly 12,000 people (7% of Maldives' population).** Another key concern is the merging of seasons, which has made predicting the weather and monsoon seasons particularly difficult in recent years.

Efforts to protect biodiversity and marine life have been fruitful in some respects. For example, a ban on shark fishing (to counter the demand for shark-fins which are seen as 'luxury delicacies' in China) has led to an overpopulation of sharks in the waters surrounding Maldives.

Maldives is well regarded for its tuna exports and uses ancient fishing techniques, such as pole and line fishing, which are known to be a selective, sustainable, and equitable method of catching tuna. However, fishing licenses continue to be granted to foreign vessels (such as large fishing trawlers) and this continues to risk destruction of the seabed, coral reefs and declining fish populations.



REGIONAL TRADE RELATIONSHIPS

While geographically small, **Maldives is strategically located in the Indian Ocean and attracts international attention from big players in Asia such as India and China.** India has deep and historic ties with Maldives, which have been strengthened further during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maldives is heavily reliant on imported goods and while the pandemic interfered with imports from many countries. It expressed gratitude towards India for continuing to send a steady supply of essentials like food and medicines.

As part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, China has invested heavily in infrastructure projects in Maldives including in a new runway at Malé International Airport and a new bridge (named the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge) linking the airport, Malé and the neighbouring commuter island, Hulhumalé.

Regional trade relationships heavily influence national politics in Maldives. There is a general debate around the influence of India, China and the Commonwealth in Maldives and divides can sometimes form around party lines. These opinions are expressed strongly on social media and during election campaigning.



PAC SCRUTINY WORKSHOP



The PAC Scrutiny Workshop took place over three days and was attended by 12 parliamentarians, 7 clerks and 6 observers from the Auditor General's Office and the Anti-Corruption Commission. Split across 13 sessions, members and clerks had the opportunity to discuss challenges and to share techniques on questioning witnesses, holding the Government to account and cross-party working.

Working practices across PACs in Asia vary significantly. Notably both Bangladesh and Maldives commented on their current **backlog of audit reports** which has prevented them from undertaking value for money inquiries.

The biggest difference highlighted was the role of the Opposition. **In Maldives and more recently in Sri Lanka, a Government Member chairs the PAC, whereas in the UK and Bangladesh the PAC is always chaired by an Opposition Member.** This difference became more apparent during a discussion on how recommendations are followed up. Some shared a view that a Government Member chairing the PAC would be able to follow up recommendations more effectively with the Government Ministers responsible for responding. Others believed that this

would be akin to 'marking one's own homework' and questioned the independence and effectiveness of the PAC in scrutinising government spending.

Another crucial difference highlighted during a committee exercise was approaches to questioning witnesses. **The UK PAC shared its experience of questioning senior civil servants - the 'accounting officers' - who appear before the UK PAC.** Whereas the other legislatures are often questioning ministers from the ruling party who are summoned to appear before the PAC. This can cause challenges for PACs to effectively scrutinise government spend as scrutinising ministers requires tact, committee unity and political neutrality.

One mechanism utilised by PACs and discussed by participants is the use of 'recall sessions' as an effective way to ensure continued government scrutiny and follow-up. Recall sessions call for the project lead to regularly update the PAC on progress and value for money. These sessions were identified by UK PAC members as a useful way of staying abreast of particularly long-running value for money issues by calling back government officials to give a progress report to the PAC.

PROGRAMME

SUNDAY 7 NOVEMBER

TIME	SESSION
1230 - 1330	Welcome by Hon. Mohamed Nashiz and accompanying parliamentarians <i>Velana International Airport</i>
1500 - 1600	Briefing by the British High Commission <i>British High Commission, Malé</i>
1630 - 1730	Meeting with PAC Chair Hon. Mohamed Nashiz and Vice Chair Hon Yaugoob Abdullah <i>People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>

MONDAY 8 NOVEMBER

TIME	SESSION
0830 - 0900	Meeting with the Deputy Speaker of the People's Majlis <i>People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>
0915 - 1000	Meeting with the Maldives-UK Parliamentary Friendship Group <i>People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>
1000 - 1030	Viewing of the People's Majlis in session <i>People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>
	Day One of the PAC Scrutiny Workshop <i>Committee Room 10, People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>
1300 - 1330	Official Welcome & Opening
1300 - 1400	Introductory Session: An Introduction to the PAC in UK & Maldives
1400 - 1445	Session 1: What makes an Effective Public Accounts Committee?
1455 - 1545	Session 2: Working with the Supreme Audit Institution
1545 - 1645	Session 3: Scrutinising Financial Information
1645 - 1700	End of Day 1 of the Workshop
1700 - 1800	Optional: Networking for workshop participants <i>People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>

TUESDAY 9 NOVEMBER

TIME	SESSION
0830 - 0930	Meeting with the Opposition Party of Maldives <i>People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>
	Day Two of the PAC Scrutiny Workshop <i>Committee Room 10, People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>
0930 - 1030	Presentation of the 2021 Biennial Survey Results
	MEMBERS' SESSIONS <i>Committee Room 10</i>
	CLERKS' SESSIONS <i>Committee Room 11</i>
1030 - 1130	Session 4a: Evidence-Based and Gender-Sensitive Scrutiny
	Session 4b: Managing the PAC's Work Programme & Working with Government
1145 - 1245	Session 5a: Building Cross-Party Consensus
	Session 5b: Working with Witnesses and Members
1345 - 1445	Session 6a: Effective Questioning
	Session 6b: Briefing Members and drafting questions
1500 - 1530	Session 7: Committee Exercise Briefing <i>Committee Room 10, People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>
1630 - 1700	Reflection & Discussion <i>Committee Room 10, People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>
1700 - 1830	Debrief and preparation for the final day of the Workshop <i>Committee Room 10, People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>

WEDNESDAY 10 NOVEMBER

TIME	SESSION		
	Day Three of the PAC Scrutiny Workshop <i>Committee Room 10, People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>		
0930 - 0945	Summary of Day 2 and Feedback		
0945 - 1030	Session 8: Preparing for the Committee Hearing (including Clerk-led Committee Briefing)		
1030 - 1230	Session 9: Simulated Committee Hearing Exercise		
1300 - 1400	Session 10: Post Committee Hearing Meeting & Debrief on Committee Exercise		
	<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">MEMBERS' SESSIONS <i>Committee Room 10</i></td> <td style="width: 50%;">CLERKS' SESSIONS <i>Committee Room 11</i></td> </tr> </table>	MEMBERS' SESSIONS <i>Committee Room 10</i>	CLERKS' SESSIONS <i>Committee Room 11</i>
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1400 - 1445	<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Session 11a: Report Agreement</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Session 11b: Drafting Reports & Recommendations</td> </tr> </table>	Session 11a: Report Agreement	Session 11b: Drafting Reports & Recommendations
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1445 - 1545	Session 11c: Effective PAC Follow-up <i>Committee Room 10, People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>		
1600 - 1645	Session 12: Engaging with the Media and Public <i>Committee Room 10, People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>		
1645 - 1715	Feedback and Closing <i>Committee Room 10, People's Majlis, Parliament of Maldives</i>		

THURSDAY 11 NOVEMBER

TIME	SESSION
0900 - 1600	Programme of meetings outside of Malé Meeting with Atoll Councillors (Local Government) Tour of nearby Island (including school; health centre; generator plant and local transport)

SHARED LEARNING

The challenges and learning each legislature shared throughout the programme were varied and wide-reaching. The most noteworthy aspect of the workshop was the culture of trust, transparency and openness among delegates which allowed them to share challenges and opportunities with one another.

MALDIVES

Delegates from the Maldives expressed their interest in conducting **more value for money reports** and discussed plans for moving their portfolio of issues towards topical, relevant and focused inquiry reports. Parliamentarians have expressed a desire for continued cooperation in the future.

BANGLADESH

Delegates from Bangladesh highlighted that they would like to **strengthen the relationship with the Supreme Audit Institution**. While the PAC's work is based on Auditor General reports, the relationship between the PAC and the Auditor-General was described as largely one-sided with little room for dialogue or exchange. Like the Maldives, the PAC was focused on a backlog of audit reports but hoped that a stronger working relationship with the Auditor General's Office could help to address this.

SRI LANKA

Established in 1923, Sri Lanka's PAC is one of the oldest and is currently composed of 14 government members and 8 opposition members. Delegates from Sri Lanka shared the recent changes their PAC had undergone, where **all committees were now being chaired by government members**.

At the same time, Sri Lanka's PAC has one of the most comprehensive recommendation follow-up mechanisms. The system includes an annual mandatory online survey, used by the PAC to evaluate all state institutions that come under the purview of the Committee. Sri Lankan delegates explained that while the survey is excellent at following up quantitative implementation of recommendations, it lacks detail on the qualitative aspects of recommendation implementation.

UNITED KINGDOM

The UK delegates focused on their goal to **continuously improve and strengthen the committees functioning through peer-to-peer learning**. Delegates remarked on how enlightening it was to critically review a video clip of their own questioning from two years earlier, only to see that they had 'not asked the killer question'.



NEXT STEPS

All four legislatures agreed to continue collaborating through their participation in the Commonwealth Association of Public Accounts Committees (CAPAC). CAPAC was founded in 2015 with the aim of ensuring that “all Commonwealth Parliaments and the citizens they serve benefit from strong and independent Public Accounts or equivalent committees to sustain and promote the highest principles of public finance”. Almost 40 committees have since joined CAPAC.

This delegation visit marked an increased cooperation between the UK Parliament and the People’s Majlis, Maldives. CPA UK looks forward to working closely with the parliaments in the region and to assisting in strengthening their parliamentary democracy, via bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

As next steps, CPA UK looks forward to welcoming a delegation from Maldives to continue building on the learning exchanged in November 2021. In particular, future programmes will focus on:



Clearing a backlog of audit reports to move towards more value for money inquiries



Strengthening the relationship between Public Accounts Committees and Supreme Audit Institutions



Establishing a good governance framework to enable the Public Accounts Committee to function effectively and to carry out its mandate without political influence

DELEGATES



Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP

Delegation Leader

Since becoming an MP in 1992 Geoffrey served as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Rt. Hon Douglas Hogg QC MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. In 2001, he was appointed Shadow Spokesman for Transport, Local Government & the Regions. In 2002, he became a Shadow Minister for Local & Devolved Government Affairs. In 2004, he was appointed as an Opposition Whip and later became Assistant Chief Whip. When David Cameron was elected Leader of the Conservative Party, Geoffrey was appointed the Shadow Minister for Trade & Foreign Affairs. Geoffrey was later appointed the Shadow Minister for International Development and Trade, a role in which he served until the 2010 General Election. He was knighted for Political and Public Service in 2018.



Dame Meg Hillier MP

Dame Meg was elected Chair of the PAC in 2015 and is the current Chair of the Commonwealth Association of Public Account Committees (CAPAC). First elected to Parliament in 2005, she has held the roles of junior Home Office Minister and Shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. She also served on The Speaker of the House of Commons' Digital Democracy Commission. Set up by the Speaker, the Commission investigated the opportunities digital technology can bring for parliamentary democracy in the UK and reported in January 2015. Before entering Parliament she represented Hackney, Islington and Waltham Forest on the London Assembly. A former local councillor, she was also the youngest ever Mayor of Islington in 1998/99.



Mr Richard Bacon MP

Mr Richard Bacon is the Conservative MP for South Norfolk, and has been an MP continuously since 7 June 2001. He served on the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) for sixteen years and was the PAC's deputy chairman from 2010 to 2017. Based on his PAC experiences, Richard wrote the book 'Conundrum: Why Every Government Gets Things Wrong - and What We Can Do About It' and contributed to the book 'How to Run a Country'. He has led workshops for the National Audit Office and the World Bank, and lectured widely, including at the London School of Economics and at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford.



Mr Bradley Albrow

Brad has worked in the House of Commons for over 3 years. He has been Second Clerk on the Scottish Affairs Committee, the Public Accounts Committee, and the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee. He is currently a Clerk in the Public Bill Office and the Secretary to the Speaker's Committees. Prior to joining the House of Commons, Brad worked in the House of Lords for three years. He studied at King's College London (BA), and University College London (MSc).



Ms Sonu Masania

Sonu Masania is CPA UK's Asia Pacific Regional Programme Manager. Sonu leads inter-parliamentary work between UK Parliament partner legislatures to support strengthening democracy through information sharing and learning. Prior to joining CPA UK in 2020, Sonu managed programmes in the development sector, specialising in gender-based violence and abuse. Sonu holds a BA (Hons) in European Literature, Culture and Philosophy from Royal Holloway, University of London and a MA (Hons) in Human Rights Law from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London



Ms Rebekah Northall

Rebekah Northall is a Projects & Programme Manager in the Multilateral Projects Team and is the Thematic Lead for Public Accounts Committees at CPA UK. As part of this role, Rebekah also leads the Secretariat for the Commonwealth Association of Public Accounts Committees (CAPAC). Rebekah joined CPA UK in 2018. Prior to working in Parliament, Rebekah worked for the Directorate General for Education, Youth, Culture & Sport at the European Commission and previously worked for the British Council in Brussels and London based think-tank 'UK in a Changing Europe'.

ABOUT CPA UK

CPA UK supports and strengthens parliamentary democracy throughout the Commonwealth

CPA UK supports and strengthens parliamentary democracy throughout the Commonwealth. It focuses on key priority themes including **women in parliament, modern slavery, financial oversight, security** and **trade**.

CPA UK brings together UK and Commonwealth parliamentarians and officials to share knowledge and experience through peer to peer learning. It aims to improve parliamentary oversight, scrutiny and representation and is located in, and funded by, the UK Parliament.

Building Stronger Parliaments and Advancing Democracy

CPA UK's core work is to build relationships with parliaments across the Commonwealth. This is achieved through a programme of **parliamentary strengthening** and **capacity building activities**. CPA UK undertakes work at the request of other parliaments around the Commonwealth, and our tailored programmes include both individual country activities, and large scale projects and activities that bring together Commonwealth parliamentarians and clerks.

For more information about our work and activities, please visit our website: uk-cpa.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CPA UK would like to thank the People's Majlis, Parliament of the Maldives for welcoming the UK delegation. In particular, CPA UK would like to thank Hon. Mohamed Nashiz MP, Chair of the Maldives PAC, and the Foreign Relations Department for their organisational support.

CPA UK also thanks the British High Commission in Malé for their briefing and support to this programme. CPA UK would like to thank H.E. Caron Röhsler and her staff, particularly Faiha Fayz, Shifra Abbas and Safa Musthafa.

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