The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

SPICe
Scottish Parliament
Information Centre
Ionad Fiosrachaidh
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

SPICe Briefing
Pàipear-ullachaidh SPICe

Support for parliamentary casework: experiences from around the Commonwealth

Professor Chris Gill

This report summarises findings from comparative research into how constituency casework is supported in a range of Commonwealth legislatures. The research identified growing recognition of the need to support casework, as well as a number of common challenges.



13 November 2026
SB 26-72

Contents

Summary 3

Acknowledgements 5

Background to the research 6

The growing volume and complexity of casework 6

Developments in Scotland: valuing the caseworker role and developing a Caseworker Forum 7

The Scottish Parliament's casework service: research findings 8

Designing and delivering a Caseworker Forum 8

Evaluation and future development of the Caseworker Forum 9

Aims and methodology of current research - practice in Commonwealth legislatures 10

Findings from the research 13

Key findings from Commonwealth Parliamentary Association information request 13

Responses from the Canada Region 14

Responses from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region 15

Responses from the Pacific Region 15

Responses from the Australia Region 15

Responses from the Africa Region 16

Workshop findings 16

Challenges regarding how casework is dealt with in Commonwealth jurisdictions 16

How casework is funded and resourced by Commonwealth legislatures 18

Information sharing and research support for casework in Commonwealth legislatures 19

Areas of good practice and suggestions for improvement 20

Conclusion and recommendations 22

Overview of key findings 22

Areas for future development 23

Pathways for future research 24

Bibliography 26

Summary

This report presents the findings of a collaborative project between the University of Glasgow and the Scottish Parliament. It examines how Commonwealth legislatures support elected Members and their staff in delivering constituency casework.

Methodology

The project involved a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) information request, which received responses from 16 legislatures across six CPA regions, and workshops involving 29 participants from legislatures across the Commonwealth. The research was undertaken in the context of increasing concern about the growing volume, complexity and emotional demands of parliamentary casework.

Context

This report highlights that constituency casework has become a significant and often under-recognised component of parliamentary work. Research in Scotland and elsewhere demonstrates that caseworkers frequently deal with complex issues involving housing, social security, immigration, health services, complaints, safeguarding concerns and mental health crises. As public expectations of elected Members have increased, constituency offices have increasingly become a source of practical advice and assistance for citizens struggling to navigate public services and administrative systems.

Findings

- **There is growing awareness of the need to support casework**

The present project found growing but inconsistent recognition across Commonwealth legislatures that effective casework requires specialist knowledge, adequate resources and institutional support. Just over half of the legislatures responding to the CPA information request reported providing formal support to elected Members and their staff.

Common forms of support included funding for constituency offices; administrative assistance; research and information services; legal advice; induction programmes; professional development opportunities; information technology support; wellbeing initiatives; and networks for information sharing and peer learning.

Several jurisdictions have developed innovative approaches, including central support teams for constituency casework; onboarding programmes for newly elected representatives and staff; training on managing difficult interactions; and structured forums through which caseworkers can exchange knowledge and experience.

Despite these examples of innovation, substantial variation exists across Commonwealth legislatures. While some jurisdictions provide well-developed support infrastructure, others offer limited assistance and rely largely on individual elected Members to organise and fund casework services themselves.

- **There are common challenges across caseworkers, including the emotional toll**

Workshop participants identified a number of common challenges in dealing with casework. These included difficulties obtaining timely information and responses from

government departments; high workloads; insufficient staffing resources; the growing complexity of constituent issues; and limited access to training.

Participants also highlighted the emotional toll of casework, particularly where staff regularly engage with individuals experiencing distress, mental health crises or severe hardship. Concerns about stress, burnout and vicarious trauma emerged as important themes in many jurisdictions.

- **Future priorities**

The findings suggest four priorities for future development of support for parliamentary casework.

1. Legislatures should recognise casework as a specialised professional function requiring skilled staff and dedicated support.

2. Greater attention should be paid to staff wellbeing through expanded mental health support, resilience training and peer-support mechanisms.

3. Legislatures should consider strengthening institutional support structures through dedicated casework services, research resources, information portals and stronger liaison arrangements with government agencies.

4. There is significant potential to improve information sharing and collaborative learning through networks, forums and communities of practice. The success of the Scottish Parliament's Caseworker Forum demonstrates the benefits of bringing caseworkers together to share expertise, access training and develop professional networks.

Finally, the report identifies a need for further research on the practice of casework, the wellbeing of caseworkers, the effectiveness of training and support initiatives, and the experiences of constituents themselves.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank:

- all the participants from Commonwealth legislatures who participated in the project
- the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Research Service, which supported the project by issuing an information request and promoting participation in workshops
- Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) staff who took notes during workshops
- Nwe Mon Mon Oo, a Research Intern at the University of Glasgow who provided valuable research assistance on the project.

Background to the research

This report summarises the outcomes of a collaborative project conducted by Professor Chris Gill (University of Glasgow), Abigail Bremner (Scottish Parliament Information Centre), and Jack McLean (Internal Communications and Engagement Team, Scottish Parliament). The project sought to explore how legislatures across the Commonwealth provide support for parliamentary casework. It was funded by the University of Glasgow Knowledge Exchange Fund.

This introduction covers three areas:

- background information on the growing volume and complexity of casework
- research in Scotland and the development of a Caseworker Forum
- the aims and methodology used in the current project.

In this report, **casework** refers to requests from members of the public for advice and support with regard to their problems. Casework refers to individual requests for support, rather than correspondence from constituents on policy issues or as part of public campaigns.

The growing volume and complexity of casework

The way in which legislatures support elected Members and their support staff (in this report, referred to as “caseworkers”) is an increasingly pressing issue in light of growing volumes of casework and increasing complexity in terms of the issues involved.

Recent research by Rethink Mental Illness [1] , exploring experiences of casework in the UK Parliament, found that:

- 88% of MPs’ staff surveyed have direct experience dealing with a suicidal constituent
- 53% report their own mental health being negatively impacted by mental health casework
- 54% of MPs’ staff reported an increase in the amount of mental health casework since starting in the role.

There has also been significant recent commentary on the growth of casework and the fact that it cannot replace shortfalls in the availability of legal advice. In her essay for the Nuffield Foundation’s essay collection, Why Justice Matters, Dame Karen Buck argued [2] :

> “ MPs’ surgeries are often a last-gasp place to try when other, more suitable help is nowhere to be found. But as the caseload numbers rise, even dedicated politicians with superlative staff can’t give every case the attention that it needs.”

The 2026 annual survey of MP staff in the UK [3] records that 64% of respondents “found it hard to meet the demands of the job within the timescales provided”. A key driver for this was the rising volume of casework, with qualitative comments from MP staff including:

> “ 5,000 emails in 2024 became nearly 10,000 in 2025. How is any office ever supposed to get through that?”

> “ My job is just 100 people constantly chasing me, each of whom have no idea there's another 99 people just like them, and they can't understand why I can't get back to them in any sort of timely way.”

> “ The caseloads are too large and unmanageable and every month sees a new record number of cases. It's not just the case numbers but the complexity of the issues raised.”

This survey also pointed out the absence of clear parameters for the casework role, which significantly added to the difficulty in dealing with cases:

> “ There is no clear set of rules about what cases MPs take, how long before a response, how far a caseworker / MP should go in solving the problem.”

In the UK, the current situation has been described as a “casework crisis”, [4] and the complex reality of casework has become a live issue across the Commonwealth. In Canada, for example, there have been calls for greater standardisation of casework practices and more support to be provided for caseworkers [5] . New training opportunities have also been developed in recognition of the highly demanding and emotionally draining nature of casework [6] .

Professor Philip Norton – in an essay for the Funding Democracy Green Paper published by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority – surveyed how casework is funded in legislatures across the world. He found considerable differences in the roles of elected Members, the language used to describe caseworkers, and the funding available to support casework [7] .

Given this context, the current project aimed to explore what could be learned from jurisdictions around the world about how legislatures support casework. With support from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Research Service, the project focused on legislatures in Commonwealth countries.

Developments in Scotland: valuing the caseworker role and developing a Caseworker Forum

As part of a Scottish Parliament Academic Fellowship, Professor Gill conducted research into parliamentary casework in Scotland. The report of the research – The Scottish Parliament's casework service: understanding the hidden work of MSPs [8] – was published in 2020.

This part of the briefing looks at:

- the research findings
- designing and delivering a Caseworker Forum
- evaluation of the Caseworker Forum and plans for future development.

The Scottish Parliament's casework service: research findings

Casework as a significant public service

This research highlighted that MSP casework had become a significant publicly funded advice service. This service depended heavily on the work of caseworkers, whose role was demanding and under-recognised.

Indeed, caseworkers performed a complex, highly skilled role that goes far beyond administrative support. They often encountered constituents experiencing distressing or difficult circumstances and their role required empathy, patience, interpersonal skills, organisational ability, research expertise, tenacity, and political awareness to manage cases effectively.

MSPs were receiving an estimated average of 880 cases per year, with only around 1.4 full-time equivalent staff dedicated to casework in each office. The research found that caseworkers carry a substantial workload while navigating complex complaints, involving public bodies, private companies, and civil disputes.

The need to improve support for caseworkers

A key finding of the research was that caseworkers felt insufficiently supported in carrying out these responsibilities. Several reported feelings of isolation and identified gaps in the training, guidance, and professional support available to them. Despite the crucial role they play in securing positive outcomes for constituents, there was a perception that the Scottish Parliament provided limited support for the casework function.

Some participants argued that casework should be viewed as a professional, largely non-political service that reflected not only on individual MSPs but also on the reputation of the Scottish Parliament as an institution. The quality and consistency of support available to constituents were also perceived to vary between MSP offices, raising potential concerns about unequal experiences for service users.

The research found that casework frequently delivered tangible benefits for constituents, often resolving cases within six weeks and improving people's situations. However, it suggested that sustaining these outcomes required greater investment in the people who undertake the work.

Consequently, the recommendations in the report focused on strengthening support for caseworkers. A key recommendation related to creating “a network or forum for caseworkers, where issues of common interest and best practice could be discussed.”

Designing and delivering a Caseworker Forum

In response to the research recommendation to develop a forum for caseworkers, the Scottish Parliament partnered with Professor Gill to deliver a project to create a Caseworker Forum. This was funded through an Economic and Social Research Council Impact Acceleration Account grant.

To ensure the delivery of the Caseworker Forum is caseworker-led, a Steering Group was set up at the outset of the project. Caseworkers volunteer to participate and provide input into the proposed sessions and their content.

The Caseworker Forum was set up in the course of 2021-2022 and held its first session in March 2022.

Information sessions

Since then, it has facilitated around 30 sessions with a variety of experts in their subject areas. These have ranged from Social Security Scotland to Marie Curie, and on topics including support available to the public with their energy bills to understanding the Scottish planning system.

Caseworker Forum sessions have included inputs from the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), as well as contributions from organisations including:

- Advice Direct Scotland
- Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
- Govan Law Centre
- Openreach Scotland
- Samaritans
- Resilience Learning Partnership
- Home Energy Scotland.

Online resources

A set of intranet pages has been developed with resources and previous session recordings so that caseworkers can refer to them when cases come in. Crucially, the programme of sessions and resources has been curated in collaboration with caseworkers themselves to ensure the content is relevant and useful.

Evaluation and future development of the Caseworker Forum

Feedback from Caseworker Forum participants

The Caseworker Forum has been subject to continuous evaluation, with feedback collected after each session, and annual surveys distributed to caseworkers. Feedback from those who have engaged with the Caseworker Forum has been extremely positive, with key feedback from caseworkers including:

- the Caseworker Forum is a valuable resource
- the Caseworker Forum has helped caseworkers upskill and made a practical impact in their work
- caseworkers feel they are valued as a result of the work the Caseworker Forum has been doing.

Qualitative feedback from caseworkers regarding the Casework Forum includes:

> “ Overall, I find the Caseworker Forum helps me to feel connected to the Parliament and other MSP staff who have a shared understanding, it supports the sharing of knowledge and working together from a collective perspective to support constituents. ”

> “ The Caseworker Forum has been a valuable resource for helping navigate casework and previous sessions include a wealth of research and information relating to how best to advise constituents with challenges that they are facing. Indeed, some of the sessions that have helped me the most include those which have helped with taking care of my own wellbeing.”

> “ The forum has been an invaluable resource for me as a caseworker, in the way that it has catered training sessions specific to our needs, engages with us directly to seek our feedback and by making me feel connected with caseworkers across Scotland.”

> “ It has also brought caseworkers together during the forum sessions and provided reassurance that we’re all in the same boat with many of the pressures we face every day. It is great to know the Parliament is making an effort to recognise the work we do, despite most of us working remotely and not being ‘at’ Holyrood very often.”

Future development plans

Going forward, the Steering Group will continue to play a key role in the development of sessions for the Forum. It will be supported by parliamentary colleagues from SPICe and the Colleague Experience team (covering internal communications and learning and development expertise).

The intention is for the Steering Group to develop beyond being a consultative group to also fulfil an engagement role as champions for the Forum’s work. This would include raising awareness of the Forum for other caseworkers in the Scottish Parliament, encouraging participation, and providing the wider Parliament community with recognition of the valuable role caseworkers contribute to the institution.

Aims and methodology of current research - practice in Commonwealth legislatures

A feature of the academic literature on parliamentary casework is that it predominantly addresses the political significance of casework (e.g. whether it leads to electoral advantage and how it relates to the wider work of legislatures), rather than considering what the practice of casework actually involves [9] . There is also little literature addressing the specific question of how legislatures support casework.

Having developed the Caseworker Forum, a further collaborative project between Professor Gill and the Scottish Parliament was set up to look at practice internationally and identify opportunities for learning and development. The focus on Commonwealth legislatures was chosen in order to allow a diversity of experiences to be captured, while also allowing a degree of comparability. In pragmatic terms, this focus was also chosen because the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association provided a focal point for promoting participation in the project to its members.

The project had the following aims:

- to engage in reflective dialogue with Commonwealth legislatures in relation to parliamentary casework and how it is supported
- to identify and share best practice across the Commonwealth in relation to the delivery of support provided by legislatures to parliamentarians and their staff with regards to casework
- to work with Commonwealth legislatures to identify knowledge gaps and areas where further research is needed.

In order to deliver these aims, the project involved two activities:

- the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Research Service circulated a request for information to its members (16 responses received)
- three online workshops were conducted at different times of the day in order to facilitate participation from as many legislatures as possible (29 participants took part).

Workshops lasted two hours each and covered three areas:

- how casework is carried out in your jurisdiction
- funding and resourcing casework
- information sharing and support.

Detailed notes were taken of the workshops by Scottish Parliament staff and a graphic recorder also provided a visual note of each workshop.

Limitations of the project

This project had several methodological limitations:

- Participation was voluntary and the study was based on responses from 16 legislatures and 29 workshop participants. This means that the findings do not reflect practice across the Commonwealth as a whole. For example, there were no responses to the information request from the Asia, India or South-East Asia CPA regions. Similarly, not all regions were represented in the workshops.
- The project relied primarily on self-reported information from parliamentary staff and officials, which may present a more favourable picture of existing arrangements or reflect individual perspectives rather than institutional realities.
- The need to preserve participants' anonymity meant that findings are reported at regional rather than jurisdictional level. Relatively short workshops, featuring a number of participants, also restricted the ability to delve in depth into how constitutional, political and organisational differences shape approaches to casework.
- The project focused on the perspectives of legislatures and those supporting elected Members; it did not examine the views of constituents themselves or directly evaluate

the effectiveness of different approaches to supporting casework.

Findings from the research

This part of the report has three sections.

- an overview of information provided in response to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Research Service's information request to its Members
- a summary of information provided during the workshops
- conclusion and recommendations.

To preserve the anonymity of participants, this report refers to legislatures by Commonwealth Parliamentary Region, rather than naming individual jurisdictions. The nine regions are: Africa; Asia; Australia; British Islands and Mediterranean (BIM); Canada; Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic (CAA); India; Pacific; and South-East Asia.

Key findings from Commonwealth Parliamentary Association information request

Responses were received from 16 CPA branches representing six of the CPA's nine regions: Africa; Australia; British Islands and Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic; and Pacific. No responses to the information request were reported from the Asia, India or South-East Asia regions.

Overall findings

Just over half of responding legislatures provide formal support to elected Members and their staff in the delivery of constituency casework. Support takes a variety of forms, including:

- financial resources for constituency offices and staffing
- administrative and secretarial assistance
- legal and policy advice
- research and information services
- IT support
- guidance on data protection and information governance
- induction and orientation programmes
- professional development and training opportunities
- wellbeing and mental health support
- peer learning and networking opportunities for caseworkers.

Across the responses, there is evidence that legislatures increasingly recognise constituency casework as a specialised aspect of parliamentary work, requiring dedicated resources, training and organisational support. The following sections provide a summary of data provided by participants in particular Commonwealth Parliamentary Association regions.

- Canada Region
- British Islands and Mediterranean Region
- Pacific Region
- Australia Region
- Africa Region

Key themes

Three themes emerge from the findings.

- There is recognition among many respondents that constituency casework requires specialised knowledge, dedicated resources and institutional support. Rather than being the sole responsibility of elected Members, it is an activity that benefits from professional structures and parliamentary assistance.
- Adequate resourcing, training and professional development are key approaches taken where support is provided by legislatures. Formal induction programmes, ongoing education, peer learning opportunities and access to specialist expertise could help elected Members and staff manage increasingly complex constituent issues.
- Several responses highlighted the importance of staff wellbeing, resilience and safety. Mental health support, peer-support networks and training in managing difficult interactions show the importance of managing the emotional and practical challenges involved in constituency work.

The findings from the information request provided a helpful baseline for the subsequent workshops.

Responses from the Canada Region

The most extensive examples of casework support were reported by respondents from the Canada Region. Respondents described onboarding and training programmes for both elected Members and their staff, including formal induction arrangements; webinars introducing constituency casework; access to legal, research, human resources and communications support; and the provision of mental health resources.

Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that newly elected Members were equipped to establish and operate constituency offices effectively from the outset of their parliamentary careers. Training on managing challenging constituent interactions and de-escalating potentially violent situations also featured prominently.

Respondents from the Canada Region also reported examples of strong institutional support through parliamentary information and research services. Constituency offices

benefited from access to specialist research, local issue monitoring, briefing materials, training resources and administrative guidance. Financial support mechanisms were also reported by respondents, including funding streams that enable elected Members to support community organisations and constituency initiatives.

Responses from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region

Responses from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region highlighted examples of practical and operational support for elected Members and their staff. Examples included dedicated constituency support teams capable of assisting with research, report writing, liaison with government departments and external organisations, and helping identify solutions to complex constituent problems. Such arrangements could provide elected Members with specialist expertise that could enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of constituency services.

Respondents from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region also reported a range of institutional support services, including administrative assistance, reception services, information technology support, and advice relating to Freedom of Information and data protection obligations. These services help Members manage the increasingly complex legal and operational demands associated with constituency casework.

Responses from the Pacific Region

Respondents from the Pacific Region reported a focus on collaboration, capacity building and support networks. Respondents described regular forums to bring together constituency staff from across parliamentary systems to discuss cases, exchange experiences, share solutions and access expert advice. Ongoing peer-support mechanisms, including virtual meetings and professional networks, were highlighted as important ways of reducing isolation and improving practice.

Respondents from this region also reported induction programmes, administrative assistance, legal and policy advice, research support, training opportunities and technical assistance. These measures were intended both to strengthen elected Members' ability to address constituent concerns and to improve broader legislative effectiveness and public service delivery.

Responses from the Australia Region

Responses from the Australia Region emphasised staffing support within constituency offices. Dedicated electorate officers were reported as playing a central role in assisting constituents, providing advice and referrals, and following up on individual cases. Support for these staff included professional development opportunities and annual conferences designed to strengthen their skills and improve service quality. This reflected an approach that aimed to enhance constituency services through investment in the knowledge and capabilities of frontline casework staff.

Responses from the Africa Region

Examples reported from this region were more limited than those from some other regions. Responses from the Africa Region highlighted the importance of financial support in enabling elected members to deliver constituency services effectively. This included funding for constituency office operations and staffing. The provision of financial resources was seen as an essential prerequisite for maintaining effective constituency engagement and responding to public concerns.

Workshop findings

The workshop findings are presented under four headings:

- challenges regarding how casework is dealt with in Commonwealth jurisdictions
- how casework is funded and resourced by Commonwealth legislatures
- information sharing and research support for casework in Commonwealth legislatures
- areas of good practice and suggestions for improvement.

Participants attended the workshops from the following regions:

Table 1: Attendance at workshops

Jurisdiction	Number of participants
Africa Region	2
Australia Region	3
British Islands and Mediterranean Region	14
Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region	3
Canada Region	5
South-East Asia Region	2

Challenges regarding how casework is dealt with in Commonwealth jurisdictions

Participants identified challenges relating to identifying a point of contact in government agencies, high workloads and limited resources, and a lack of training. Some participants also raised jurisdiction-specific challenges.

Challenges identifying point of contact in government agencies

Participants from across Commonwealth regions reported frustrations when contacting government agencies. A participant from the Africa Region mentioned that they had to go through several government officials to reach the right person who could support the matter at hand. This point was supported by a participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region, who mentioned that there was no information on who to contact if one Minister cannot support.

A participant from the Canada Region also discussed the importance of relationships and finding the right person in each department to submit questions through. A lot depended

on personal connections. A participant from the South-East Asia Region added that the biggest difficulty was getting answers from central government or relevant agencies, which led to issues raised by constituents not being addressed.

Participants from the Australia and Africa Regions noted that this issue was exacerbated by the fact that a lot of knowledge was lost when there was a change of elected Members. Contacts and information would not generally be passed on to their successors.

Challenges related to workloads, lack of resources and the mental health burden of dealing with casework

Participants from the British Islands and Mediterranean and Canada Regions discussed the insufficient support and resources available for managing casework. A participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region stated that the volume of casework exceeded what current resources could handle. Because casework was becoming more complex, caseworkers had to spend significant time learning and researching.

Another participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region mentioned that a new team of four parliamentary employees had been created to support Members with their casework. However, questions remained about what constituted appropriate support for the Members.

A participant from the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region noted wide variations in the resources available to pay elected representatives and fund case work. This put Members in a difficult position because they often had another job alongside their elected role, and no staff or resources to assist with casework. The lack of caseworker staff was also noted by participants from the British Islands and Mediterranean and South-East Asia regions.

Participants also discussed the strain of dealing with casework, which arose from repeatedly dealing with people who were upset and facing significant hardship. Some participants mentioned not feeling well supported to deal with the subsequent strain in their own mental health and wellbeing.

Challenges related to lack of training

Participants shared concerns about the need for training to handle mental health issues in constituencies and safeguarding concerns. A participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region emphasized the importance of training on how to address mental health concerns raised via casework, especially regarding how to handle adults at risk and when to raise a safeguarding concern. A participant from the Canada Region also expressed concerns about the lack of training for staff members who need to provide support across a wide range of demands.

Other challenges

Participants discussed challenges specific to their jurisdictions, beyond the categories listed above. A participant from the Canada Region mentioned that the biggest challenge was the hyper-polarization of their two-party system. This created tension between the parties, with government members often unwilling to respond to casework questions from opposition members. A participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region noted that there were no clear guidelines on expectations, boundaries, or roles for elected Members regarding casework.

How casework is funded and resourced by Commonwealth legislatures

General approach to funding casework

Most participants described a similar funding structure where the legislature provided funding and left it to Members to decide how to allocate it for hiring staff. There were, however, other participants who mentioned different approaches. In some cases, funding came from Members' own funds, or there was a hybrid system in which financial support for casework came from both political party funds and those provided by the legislature.

Different approaches were also used for fund distribution, such as providing funding based on the number of elected Members; giving Members a separate allowance to hire their own staff; or allocating staff allowances based on the size of the constituency. There were also other cases where the Members did not receive funding or resources at all.

A participant from the Canada Region mentioned that an allowance for staff was provided based on the size of the constituency, and that some Members shared a full-time caseworker rather than employing a part-time caseworker for each constituency.

A participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region explained that although Members had previously been provided with a separate allowance to hire their own staff, this policy was revoked, and now this allowance was added to the salary of the Members. It was notable, however, that another participant from the same jurisdiction added that no funds or resources were provided for casework support, suggesting that this policy may have created confusion or a lack of transparency.

Participants from the South-East Asia Region also provided contrasting perspectives. One participant mentioned that Members were required to fund their own staff, although the parties may provide some support in that regard. The other mentioned a hybrid system in which financial support for casework came from both political party funds and those provided through the administration.

A participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region described a different approach where a central support team employed by the legislature is in place to provide all Members with support for casework.

Funding for training

Regarding funding for training, participants discussed various approaches. A participant from the South-East Asia Region mentioned that some training was provided centrally for staff. Similarly, a participant from the Africa Region noted initial training for staff. A participant from the Canada Region stated that the legislature offered annual training for staff, but it focused on topics like handling difficult conversations or situations, not casework-specific topics.

In another jurisdiction, a participant noted that staff training was the responsibility of the party. TA participant from the Canada Region added that mental health support training was provided by the party through not-for-profits that ran sessions on topics like trauma-informed care, and there was no central support for training.

In addition to different overall approaches, the participants discussed challenges related to funding which was insufficient for hiring staff members, providing training, and supporting

their well-being.

Challenges from insufficient funding

A participant from the Africa Region explained that, although funding was provided to hire staff members, it was only enough to hire two staff members. This was not enough for managing around 500 cases per week. It was also noted that, although it was possible to obtain extra funding from the parties, this could create unfairness and disparate levels of support and training opportunities.

A participant from the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region also received a budget for casework support but felt it was not sufficient. A participant from the South-East Asia Region added that there was a severe shortage of funding for hiring staff, and Members often had to fund this themselves. A participant from the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region also mentioned that, although there was some central funding, Members often had to cover some of the costs of hiring staff themselves.

There were also differences with how much support legislatures provided for the recruitment process. A participant from the Australia Region said that the legislature provided frameworks and role descriptions for hiring staff, although it was noted that the actual work and job descriptions often differed and that a review was ongoing to examine this issue. A participant from the Canada Region described a different approach where the parties themselves decided on the staff roles and structures, with no centralized, designated framework.

Funding for wellbeing support

Regarding wellbeing support, participants from the Australia and the Canada regions highlighted issues with current funding and support structures. An Australia Region participant noted that the legislature's funding was limited and there was no central resource for developing wellbeing programmes.

A participant from the Canada Region also mentioned that support was provided on an ad hoc basis and was insufficient. They emphasised the need for centralized mental health assistance and for caseworkers to be recognized as frontline workers.

Additionally, a participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean region expressed frustration over the lack of mental health support from the legislature. This was especially concerning in smaller communities, where caseworkers could sometimes have difficult interactions with constituents.

Information sharing and research support for casework in Commonwealth legislatures

Information sharing

Opportunities to share information among caseworkers about approaches and routes to resolving constituent issues can save significant time and improve caseworkers’ ability to respond to constituent issues effectively. In some political systems there can be political sensitivities around this if casework is seen as producing electoral advantage.

Participants from some regions mentioned an information portal or a separate system for

sharing information, while others suggested that sharing mainly happened informally. Some participants from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region discussed the use of an information portal they were currently using or developing.

A participant from the Canada Region discussed a different approach where information sharing occurred within the political party via internal routes. This worked well, but there was no exchange of information among people working for different political parties. Another participant from the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region noted that information sharing among the staff was done informally.

Research support

Some participants noted the existence of a research service within their legislature, but described a situation where the service was either rarely used or not dedicated to individual cases. Other participants mentioned having access to both a central research service supported by their legislature and a dedicated research team.

Some participants from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region noted that caseworkers had access to a library service and researchers . Conversely, other participants from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region mentioned that, although there was a research service, it was primarily used to support committee work. While it could assist with casework, it was not often utilized for that purpose, and all casework was handled by the individual offices of elected representatives. Another participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region pointed out that the research service was provided mainly to support elected Members' work on policy and legislative issues and not on casework.

Participants frequently cited challenges related to inefficiency and lack of expertise in providing services. A participant from the Australia Region mentioned that although there was a central library, the support provided was not sufficient, as the most that could be asked for was a bibliography on a subject. Another participant from the Australia Region added that there was only a small number of staff with general research expertise.

A participant from the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region explained that although the parliament used to assist with casework, it no longer did so. While there was an initiative to facilitate contact between government and elected Members to support constituency work, it was still new and not yet fully implemented in all areas.

Areas of good practice and suggestions for improvement

Participants did not restrict their comments to highlighting challenges and noted some areas where things were working well or improving.

Government liaison and support

A participant from the Canada Region noted that some government departments had started to appoint a named individual to liaise with elected officials. This change had significantly improved getting help or information from these departments. Another participant from the Canada Region mentioned ongoing efforts to make parliamentary research services more accessible to caseworkers.

A participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean region discussed the creation of a

central parliamentary service for dealing with casework and expressed a positive outlook on how that central service would operate in future.

Training

Several participants mentioned that, although more training would be welcome, there were some existing training programmes for caseworkers. A participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region explained a new programme called “Parliamentary Excellence.” This programme, ongoing for 14 months, offered training and resources through weekly sessions covering topics like working with individuals with mental health issues, having tough conversations, and building resilience.

A participant from the Canada Region highlighted a two-day training session that caseworkers could choose to attend, focusing on parliamentary information and casework management. Similarly, a participant from the Australia Region noted that information-sharing sessions were organized for casework support, happening on an ad hoc basis to target Members or their staff. These sessions included training on vicarious trauma. There were also pilot regional training days designed to bring local staff together for two-day courses.

A participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region stated that caseworkers now had access to a new service, which included support for business roles, knowledge, skills training, and an information portal. Another participant from British Islands and Mediterranean added that there was a separate team for parliamentary skills training which provided training sessions, including continued professional development training and resilience training. Different delivery methods were utilised to target caseworkers, including methods like handbooks, drop-ins, and online sessions.

Feedback

Participants from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region described initiatives for gathering feedback on support services from caseworkers. In one British Islands and Mediterranean Region jurisdiction, research was being carried out on the impact of new support services and efforts to bridge the relationship between the parliament and caseworkers in local offices. In another British Islands and Mediterranean Region jurisdiction, there were initiatives to ensure that all members were engaged with the service.

Consent

Participants from the Canada Region discussed challenges related to obtaining consent. One participant explained how difficult it was to get consent from constituents to work on their behalf and noted that this challenge had led to the development of a centralized, simplified system for all elected officials, which had been effective in overcoming this difficulty.

Suggestions for improving practice

Participants offered suggestions to address the challenges they identified.

- A participant from the Africa Region recommended developing a shared framework of contacts across government departments and increasing collaboration between Members and government agencies. They also noted that this enhanced working relationship would enable better analysis of constituency issues and more efficient

resource allocation.

- A participant from the Australia Region proposed using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to help reduce the response time from government agencies when information was requested.
- A participant from the British Islands and Mediterranean Region also highlighted the importance of consistent support and the need to use diverse training approaches from multiple perspectives, which could help accommodate different learning styles.

Conclusion and recommendations

This project set out to explore how Commonwealth legislatures support elected Members and their staff in the delivery of parliamentary casework and to identify opportunities for shared learning and future development. Drawing on responses from 16 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association branches and workshops involving 29 participants from across the Commonwealth, the findings demonstrate the growing role of casework within parliamentary systems and the significant challenges facing those responsible for delivering it.

This part of the report looks at:

- an overview of key findings
- areas for future development

Overview of key findings

The project found evidence of rising volumes of casework, increasing complexity in constituent problems, and growing expectations from the public about what elected representatives can do to help them. In many jurisdictions, constituency offices deal with highly complex issues involving housing, immigration, social security, health services, legal problems and mental health concerns. These developments mirror wider evidence from the United Kingdom and elsewhere that casework is becoming both more intensive and more demanding.

Growing, but inconsistent, support for casework from legislatures

The project found these challenges are increasingly being recognised by legislatures, along with the fact that casework requires specialist knowledge, resources and institutional support. More than half of legislatures who responded to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association request for information reported providing some form of assistance to elected Members and their staff.

Supports included funding for constituency offices; induction programmes; professional development opportunities; research services; legal advice administrative assistance; information technology resources; wellbeing initiatives; and opportunities for networking and peer support.

At the same time, the project identified substantial variation in the level and nature of support available across jurisdictions. Some legislatures have established sophisticated support structures, such as comprehensive onboarding programmes, dedicated

constituency casework support teams, regular training opportunities and formal networks for caseworkers.

Others provide only limited support or rely largely on elected representatives to organise and fund their own arrangements. This variation reflects differences in constitutional traditions, resources and political cultures, but it also suggests that there remain significant opportunities for mutual learning across Commonwealth legislatures.

Common challenges

The workshops highlighted several common challenges:

- Participants frequently described difficulties identifying the correct contacts within government departments and obtaining timely responses to constituent enquiries. Effective casework often depended on personal relationships and informal networks rather than clear institutional relationships.

- High workloads and limited staffing resources were another common concern. Many participants also discussed the emotional burden associated with casework, particularly when supporting people experiencing crisis, hardship or mental health difficulties. Concerns about stress, burnout and vicarious trauma were evident across multiple jurisdictions.

- Another significant finding was the lack of consistency in training and professional development opportunities. Although examples of good practice were identified, many participants reported little formal training being available despite dealing with highly complex issues requiring knowledge, judgement and interpersonal skills. Training needs were particularly evident in areas such as safeguarding, mental health awareness, trauma-informed practice and managing difficult interactions with constituents.

The value of knowledge sharing and peer support

Finally, the project highlighted the value of knowledge sharing and peer support. Examples from Scotland and other Commonwealth jurisdictions suggest that caseworker networks, forums and communities of practice can reduce professional isolation, facilitate problem-solving and can contribute to improving the consistency and quality of services provided to constituents. Participants frequently expressed enthusiasm for opportunities to learn from colleagues facing similar challenges.

Areas for future development

The findings suggest a number of areas where legislatures could take action to provide further support for casework.

- T**here should be greater recognition of casework as a specialised professional function.** The day-to-day management of casework increasingly depends upon skilled staff working in demanding circumstances. Legislatures should therefore consider how they can better acknowledge, support and develop the expertise of caseworkers through structured training, professional development pathways and opportunities for career progression.

- **There should be a greater focus on staff wellbeing**. The evidence gathered during this project suggests that many caseworkers perform work that closely resembles other frontline public service professions, regularly engaging with individuals experiencing trauma, distress and crisis. Legislatures should therefore consider expanding access to mental health support, resilience training, employee assistance programmes and peer-support networks. Supporting the wellbeing of caseworkers is important for staff themselves but also contributes to the quality and sustainability of services provided to constituents.

- **There is scope to strengthen institutional support structures.** Dedicated constituency support teams, central information services, casework information portals, research support and specialist advisory services are used in several jurisdictions. Such arrangements can potentially improve efficiency, reduce duplication and allow elected Members and their staff to focus on supporting constituents. Legislatures may also wish to explore mechanisms for developing relationships with government agencies, including named departmental contacts, formal liaison arrangements and service standards for responding to enquiries from elected representatives.

- **Greater attention should be paid to information sharing and collaborative learning.** The Scottish Caseworker Forum provides one example of how legislatures can facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience among caseworkers. Similar approaches could be developed elsewhere, while international collaboration through the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association could support the sharing of good practice across jurisdictions.

Pathways for future research

The project also revealed important gaps in existing knowledge and opportunities for future research.

Research into the practice of parliamentary casework

There remains relatively little academic research examining the practice of parliamentary casework itself. Future studies should seek to better understand the day-to-day realities of casework, including workload patterns, the nature of constituent issues, and the skills required to perform the role effectively. Comparative research across Commonwealth jurisdictions would be particularly valuable in identifying common challenges and effective solutions.

Research into the mental health impacts of casework

Further research is also needed into the wellbeing impacts of casework. While participants frequently discussed stress, emotional labour and exposure to traumatic situations, there is limited evidence regarding the prevalence and effects of these experiences. Research exploring mental health outcomes, organisational support mechanisms and effective interventions could inform future policy development.

Research into what types of training support work best

Another priority relates to training and professional development. There is a need to better understand which forms of training are most effective, how learning can be embedded into

practice and which competencies are most important for successful casework. Formal evaluations of existing training initiatives and caseworker networks would make a valuable contribution to the evidence base.

Research into constituents' experiences of casework

Research should also examine the experiences of constituents themselves. While this project focused on the perspectives of legislatures and caseworkers, relatively little is known about how members of the public experience parliamentary casework services. Issues which could be explored further include what outcomes constituents achieve and what they value most in their interactions with constituency offices. Understanding the user perspective would provide an important complement to existing research.

Research into the role of casework in the complaints-handling landscape

Finally, future research could explore the relationship between casework and wider public service systems. Many participants observed that elected members increasingly become involved in addressing problems that originate elsewhere in government and public administration. Understanding why constituents seek assistance from elected representatives, and how parliamentary casework interacts with other advice and complaint-handling services, would help inform debates about the appropriate role of casework in contemporary democratic systems.

Bibliography

1 Rethink Mental Illness. (2026). "MPs' offices acting as 'hidden mental health service', research reveals", press release, 8 July 2026. Retrieved from https://www.rethink.org/news-and-stories/media-centre/2026/07/mps-offices-acting-as-hidden-mental-health-service-research-reveals/ [accessed 3 November 2026]

2 Nuffield Foundation. (2025). Why Justice Matters. Dame Karen Buck, "Why MPs are a flawed substitute for legal advice". Retrieved from https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/evidence-and-impact/our-programmes/public-right-to-justice/why-justice-matters/why-mps-are-a-flawed-substitute-for-legal-advice [accessed 3 November 2026]

3 MPs' Staff Wellness Working Group. (2026). MPs' Staff Survey 2026. Retrieved from https://w4mp.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/MP-Staff-Survey-2026-report.pdf [accessed 3 November 2026]

4 Politics Home. (2026). Lilley, A. "Casework crisis: increase in constituency caseload takes its toll". Retrieved from https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/mp-casework-alice-lilly [accessed 4 November 2026]

5 Canadian Parliametary Review (Vol 47, No. 4). (2025). Stos, W. "Constistent constituency offices: the case for minimum standards of record management and maintenance". Retrieved from https://www.revparlcan.ca/en/consistent-constituency-offices-the-case-for-minimum-standards-of-records-management-and-maintenance/ [accessed 4 November 2026]

6 Canadian Parliamentary Review (Vol. 48, No. 3). (2026). Bruneel, R. "Casework training for MP staff: the application of learning strategies and instructional design". Retrieved from https://www.revparlcan.ca/en/casework-training-for-mp-staff-the-application-of-learning-strategies-and-instructional-design/ [accessed 3 November 2026]

7 Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. (2025). Norton, P. "Servicing constituents: a comparitive perspective" in Funding Democracy. Retrieved from https://theipsa.org.uk/servicing-constituents-a-comparative-perspective [accessed 4 November 2026]

8 Gill, C. (2020). Scottish Parliament Information Centre. The Scottish Parliament's casework service: understanding the hidden work of MSPs. Retrieved from https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/research-prepared-for-parliament/research-briefings/2020/9/24/sb-2064#dp22602 [accessed 4 November 2026]

9 Gill, C. (2023). Zeitschrift für Rechtssoziologie, (Vol. 43(1), pages 71-100). "Parliamentary casework in socio-legal perspective: a case study of complaint handling by Members of the Scottish Parliament" in . Retrieved from https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/295231/ [accessed 4 November 2026]

SPICe Scottish Parliament Information Centre
Ionad Fiosrachaidh Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) Briefings are compiled for the benefit of the Members of the Parliament and their personal staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with MSPs and their staff who should contact Abigail Bremner on telephone number 85361 or abigail.bremner@parliament.scot.
Members of the public or external organisations may comment on this briefing by emailing us at SPICe@parliament.scot. However, researchers are unable to enter into personal discussion in relation to SPICe Briefing Papers. If you have any general questions about the work of the Parliament you can email the Parliament's Public Information Service at info@parliament.scot
Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in SPICe briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

