



**PROCEDURE COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the meeting held via Skype for Business on Thursday 16 April 2020**

*Present:*

L. Ashton of Hyde	L. McFall of Alcluith (Chair)
L. Bew	L. Mancroft
L. Eames	L. Morris of Aberavon
B. Evans of Bowes Park	L. Newby
L. Foulkes of Cumnock	B. Smith of Basildon
L. Fowler	L. Stoneham of Droxford
L. Geddes	B. Thomas of Winchester
L. Judge	B. Warwick of Undercliffe
L. McAvoy	

B Harris watched the meeting informally.

\_\_\_\_\_ with the Clerk of the Parliaments.

No apologies were received.

Chair welcomed everyone to the Committee’s first remote meeting. He noted that the Committee would need to meet again remotely before 5 May to consider Guidance for Stage 2 of Virtual Proceedings.

**I. Virtual Proceedings Guidance**

The Chair called the Leader to speak to her letter to the Committee dated 15 April 2020.

The Leader set out the different items of business intended to be covered in Stage 1 of Virtual Proceedings from Tuesday 21 April. Business in Virtual Proceedings would need to change managed more closely via speakers list with new deadlines for members to sign up to speak. Members would not be able to participate in Virtual Proceedings from the Chamber. There would be some proceedings in the Chamber, including Second Readings, with very limited attendance.

The Leader intended to move a Business of the House motion on Tuesday 21 April to facilitate virtual proceedings, and then adjourn the House to hold virtual proceedings later that afternoon.

The Chair thanked the Leader and noted that these proposals were intended to be temporary. He invited the Committee to consider the draft Guidance on Virtual Proceedings.



In discussion, the following points were made:

- The Committee gave a broad welcome to proposals.
- Concern was expressed that taking Second Readings in the Chamber would exclude members from participating in discussion on important items of legislation. The point was made that Second Reading debates needed to include backbench as well as frontbench members. It was recognised that a motion was needed at end of Second Reading, and some members proposed that Second Reading debates could be taken in virtual proceedings, with the formal motion then taken in the Chamber after the virtual debate. There was also a discussion about the nature of members' contributions at Committee Stage if they had been unable to make speeches at Second Reading. In particular, a number of members would be unable to speak in the Second Reading of the Windrush Compensation Scheme (Expenditure) Bill if it was taken in the Chamber. The Leader gave a commitment for a debate in Government time on Windrush within the next month.
- There was strong support for discouraging members from attending proceedings in the Chamber to protect both members and staff; and strong support for encouraging members to participate in Virtual Proceedings.
- It was noted that the proposals would effect significant change in how the House conducted its business. It was accepted that Virtual Proceedings would need fine tuning in light of experience.
- It was noted that there were a number of issues about the inability to broadcasting proceedings in short term during Stage 1, but they did not fall within the remit of this committee. The plan was to ensure Virtual Proceedings could be fully broadcast from Stage 2.
- There was a suggestion for a sunset clause on these proposals to ensure they remained temporary.
- The Committee accepted that it was a matter for the House of Lords Commission to consider whether there was a case for members being eligible to claim a daily allowance for attending Virtual Proceedings.
- There was a proposal to look at the possibility of hybrid sittings (as proposed in the Commons) for Stage 2.
- In response to a question, the Lord Speaker informed the Committee that he intended to take the Chair in Virtual Proceedings from the Isle of Wight, and stressed the importance of rehearsals before live Virtual Proceedings began.



- There was support for the proposal for Topical Questions for Written Answer.
  
- In response to questions, the Leader:
  - Explained how Speakers Lists would work for Virtual Proceedings. This would be set out in the Committee's published Guidance. Oral Questions would have a time limit of 10 minutes.
  - For supplementary questions, a member would only need to sign up to ask a supplementary question, and could decide what to ask during the Virtual Proceeding.
  - Agree there would be a need to review the Guidance. If restrictions started to be lifted, it would be possible to evolve the Virtual Proceedings model and work towards more members participating in the Chamber. But this would need to be done in line with medical advice.
  - Confirmed that to take motions in the Chamber, the House would need to be quorate.
  - Confirmed there would be gaps between business. The Usual Channels would agree each day the specific times at which each item of virtual business would start to allow people to log in and participate. She noted that proceedings would have to be more organised.
  - Acknowledged the need to relax the approach to speeches at Committee stage if Second Readings had been taken in the Chamber with very few members present.
  - Endorsed the Government's strong message that members should stay away from the Chamber.
  
- In response to further questions, the Clerk of the Parliaments:
  - Confirmed that Virtual Proceedings would be made available in Hansard in the usual way, and rolling Hansard would be available roughly 2 to 3 hours after the each Virtual Proceeding.
  - Confirmed that sufficient Deputy Chairmen were available to support both Chamber and Virtual Proceedings.
  - Noted that the Commons planning to use Zoom for public broadcasting, and the at the Lords would need to make decision on the technology platform for Stage 2. He noted that public broadcasting could ingest any form of video conferencing technology; and assured the Committee that efforts would be made to achieve some form of broadcast of Virtual Proceedings in the second week.
  - Confirmed that connectivity checks would be carried out by the Administration. Once proceedings were publicly broadcast, we would ensure appearances on screen were as good as they can be.
  - Confirmed that accessing proceedings needed to be through a Parliamentary Network account, and that arrangements would be made to support members with a disability to participate.



- Confirmed that there would be no public access to galleries.
- The Committee recorded its thank to those involved in drawing up proposals for Virtual Proceedings at such short notice which represented a remarkable effort.

The Committee **agreed** Guidance on Virtual Proceedings to be published as soon as possible and sent to all members by email. The Committee also **agreed** to re-set the limit on Oral Questions from 2 June.

## 2. **Any Other Business**

The Chair and the Lord Speaker recorded their thanks to Kate Lawrence who was leaving the Lords Administration, and to Kate and Chloe for their work as a job-share supporting the Committee.

Kate Lawrence/Chloe Mawson  
*Clerks to the Procedure Committee*