



PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday 3 June 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
B. Harris of Richmond	V. Ullswater
L. Judge	B. Warwick of Undercliffe
L. McAvoy	

with the Clerk of the Parliaments.

No apologies were received.

I. Procedure in Hybrid house

The Chair introduced the paper (PC/19-21/30). He reminded the Committee that the guidance reflected decisions already made except where highlighted.

He informed the Committee that he was already aware of two necessary changes:

- In a division, due to changes in Zoom functionality collection of the virtual participants' voices was now problematic, and should be dispensed with. This would be reflected in the guidance. The Usual Channels would ensure that if any remote participant had signalled an intention to divide in any speech, and had not subsequently notified a contrary intention, a division would be called.
- The draft of the guidance in front of the Committee suggested that Thursdays may be used only for secondary legislation. The intention was that they could be used for any type of legislation. The guidance would be updated to reflect this.

The Committee *agreed* these changes.

The Leader of the House explained that the Bishops had indicated that they would wear their robes if saying the prayers in the Chamber but would prefer not otherwise to wear their robes in the Chamber. It was *agreed* that the guidance should be updated to reflect the Bishops' wishes.



The Committee noted that it may not always be possible for a virtual member to follow the usual rules of debate around being present for the opening and closing speeches and the speeches immediately before and after their own. It was *agreed* that the guidance would be updated to encourage members to obey the usual rules of debate where possible.

It was noted that the current system of agreement between the Usual Channels on the allocation of places on final Speakers' Lists between the members of different parties and groups was working well.

It was *agreed* that the guidance would be amended to make it clear that non-affiliated peers and Bishops would be allocated one question between them across each Oral Statement session[, unless supply exceeded demand].

The Committee confirmed their previous decision that interventions on speakers should not be admitted. If a member in the Chamber sought to make a spontaneous intervention during proceedings the Chair and the whips would bring them to order. This should be kept under review.

The Leader of the House proposed that hybrid sittings for amending stages of bills should start no earlier than 12.30pm rather than 2.30pm as in the draft guidance. The Clerk of the Parliaments noted that the Legislation Office could not be confident of meeting this deadline. The Committee agreed to Leader's proposal, but on the basis that the actual start time would need to reflect the circumstances, to enable orderly proceedings.

Lord Newby proposed that the guidance that members should be strongly encouraged to participate remotely should be removed. He explained that he thought it was odd to discourage members from coming to the Chamber when Commons members were being actively encouraged to attend the physical Chamber. The Leader of the Opposition said that members should follow the guidance of Public Health England. Members should also be aware of the impact that physical attendance would have on other members and staff.

The Committee agreed that the guidance should be updated to read:

“Members continue to be encouraged to participate remotely, and in deciding whether to participate physically or remotely, members should take into account (1) the Government's guidance relating to work and social distancing; (2) their own personal circumstances; and (3) the constraints on the Chamber outlined below. “

2. Formal motions

The Chairman noted that as the guidance as currently drafted required all business to be taken in a hybrid House. This would mean that nobody could speak unless they were on the Speakers' List. This was an issue for motions that are normally taken formally after oral questions, without a Speakers' List.

The Committee *agreed* that formal motions after oral questions should be taken as physical business only. No remote participation would be allowed but anyone present in the Chamber could intervene as normal. The mover of the motion would be able to move the



motion remotely but only accept questions from those physically present. The Committee noted that this breached the principle of absolute parity between those participating remotely and those participating in the Chamber.

3. Oral update on remote voting

The Chair reported that development of the remote voting system remained on track. The members of the Committee would be invited to take part in early testing, followed by tests open to all members of the House.

The Committee needed to sign off the system before it went live and the Committee *agreed* to hold a brief meeting on 12 June.

4. Any Other Business

Lord Judge pointed out that there were a number of topical QWAs which had not been answered within the five day time limit. The Chief Whip explained that the topical QWA had been an early response to help the House in its scrutiny of the Government during the COVID-19 crisis. He invited the Committee to consider whether topical QWA should now be discontinued. The Committee agreed to consider the proposal further in the light of discussions in the Usual Channels.

The Committee agreed to meet again on Friday 12 June at 10.30am.

Chloe Mawson
Clerk of the Procedure Committee