



SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes

Thursday 9 July at 1pm on Microsoft Teams

Present:

Lord Laming (Chair)
Lord Ashton of Hyde
Lord Borwick
Lord Campbell-Savours
Lord Clement-Jones
Lord Judge
Baroness Morris of Bolton
Lord Stoneham of Droxford
Lord Touhig
Baroness Wheeler

Together with the Clerk of the Parliaments.

Carl Woodall (Director of Facilities) and Fehintola Akinlose (Director of Finance and Procurement) were also in attendance. John Bradbury (Fire Safety Manager) attended for item 3; David Clark (Head of Education and Engagement) and Abigail Fox-Smith (Director of Visitor Engagement) attended for item 4.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies. The Chair welcomed Lord Clement-Jones to the Committee. The Chair expressed thanks on behalf of the Committee to Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope for his valued service.

2. Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting

The Committee had previously agreed the minutes of the 4th meeting by correspondence.

A member raised the decision not to backdate claims for the cost of printers and printer consumables to the start of the virtual sittings of the House. It was confirmed that retrospective claims were not permitted under the offer but any requests for an exception to the rule should be directed to the Administration, who would consult the Chair on a case by case basis as necessary.

The Chair informed the Committee that since the last meeting he had approved the return of the sale of alcohol in the Peers' Guest Room from 6 July, to bring the venue in line with others on the Estate. The Committee endorsed the Chair's direction.

3. Fire safety training and update on COVID-19 secure fire safety arrangements (S/19-21/33) [RESTRICTED]

The Committee had previously agreed to a new online fire safety training module. The launch had been delayed by the impact of COVID-19 and it had previously been expected that the module would be rolled out when members had fully returned to the House. However due to the uncertainty of when that would be, and with the number of members on the Estate starting to increase the paper recommended that the module be rolled out to all members in July. The responsible person, in this case the Clerk of the Parliaments, must make information on fire safety available to all and in the current situation the online training provided the best way of informing all members on how to react to an evacuation. The online training also provided information on the new dispersal policy, previously agreed by the Committee.

The paper detailed a number of other measures used to disseminate the message to members. Communications on what to do in an evacuation with COVID-19 safety measures currently in place on the Estate had been circulated. In the case of an evacuation there would be no requirement to follow the social distancing systems put in place and individuals should make their way to the nearest available exit using the quickest safe route.

Details of the levels of completion for the new module would be shared with the whips and Convenor.

The Committee approved the release of the new fire safety training module to all members in July and the additional measures included in the paper of informing members of fire safety measures. The Committee noted the fire safety measures in place during COVID-19 and that members should now evacuate and disperse, in line with all other occupants of the Palace of Westminster.

4. The response of the Participation Team to COVID-19 (S/19-21/34) [UNRESTRICTED]

Since 17 March access for non-essential visits to the Estate had been discontinued, and this remained the position at present. The Education and Engagement Team had launched a digital learning offer and were expecting to run up to 48 remote sessions a day for schools and adult learning groups in September. 'Learn with the Lords' remote sessions were due to start in September, with over 40 members having signed up to take part.

Commercial tours were discontinued on 14 March and democratic access tours on 16 March. Some of the Visitor Services team were now engaged in other activities on the Estate. A pilot live virtual tour had been promoted utilising the virtual tour video but with a live tour guide providing information and able to answer questions of those members of the public who had booked to join the event. This had been successful, and it was intended that the format should be rolled out. A significant benefit would be that this would widen access to those who were unable to travel to London.

The Parliament online shop had now re-opened and a click and collect service would operate for the Jubilee shop from next week. The timeline for the return of on-site tours remained uncertain but work was underway to consider what these would look like. Options were being considered for further remote events including specialist talks. It was expected that there would be a reduction in visitor numbers once visitors were able to return to the Estate and that recovery to 2019 levels may take some time due to the impact of international travel and visitor confidence.

The Committee took note of the activities and plans described in the paper, and strongly supported making remote public and educational tours and activities a permanent feature of the Participation offer, which would widen access and reduce pressure on the physical estate.

5. Summary of the House of Lords Administration's response to COVID-19 (S/19-21/35) [UNRESTRICTED]

The paper set out measures the Administration had introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, including the timeline of decision making and the governance of those decisions, involving authorisation from the Leadership of the House, the Procedure Committee and the Commission.

The full cost implications for the current year, taking into account the hybrid House, compared to the previous year, were still unclear. It was expected that these would be clarified in the autumn. These figures could be made available to the Committee once available.

The Management Board had taken the decision that the Administration work to the planning assumption that the hybrid House would be in place in some form until the end of the financial year. There was no decision on when the hybrid House should continue to; this depended on the direction from the Commission and public health guidance. The planning assumption allowed decisions to be taken by offices internally for the remainder of the financial year.

It was noted that the improvements to the WiFi, although not aesthetically pleasing, had been of great benefit. The Committee passed on its thanks to the Clerk of the Parliaments and his staff for all of the work that had gone into enabling the House to sit during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee requested that the paper be updated and given wider publicity along with a covering letter from the Chair expressing the Committee's gratitude for the efforts of all involved.

6. AOB

The Committee agreed to the September meeting date being moved from 10 September to 24 September.

Due to the current changes to the sitting times of the House, whilst the Committee sat virtually, the meeting time may be varied to account for urgent business in the Chamber.

A further paper on Electric Vehicle Charging would be considered at an appropriate point after the summer.

The Committee agreed that until it next met the Chair should be authorised to take decisions on its behalf unless he felt the need to consult the Committee more widely.

The next meeting will be on Thursday 24 September.

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