



## HOUSE OF LORDS COMMISSION

### Minutes

Tuesday 15 September 2020

#### Attendance

- Lord Speaker (Chairman)
- Lord McFall of Alcluith (Deputy Chairman)
- Baroness Doocey
- Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
- Liz Hewitt (external member)
- Mathew Duncan (external member)
- Lord Judge
- Lord Laming
- Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall
- Lord Newby
- Baroness Smith of Basildon
- Lord Wakeham

Ed Ollard, Clerk of the Parliaments, was in attendance. The meeting was held via Microsoft Teams.

#### I. Minutes and Matters Arising

The Commission agreed the record of discussion of the previous meeting of the House of Lords Commission of 27 July 2020. The Lord Speaker said that a number of minor, non-substantial amendments had been submitted by Commission members and agreed with him in advance of the meeting.

The Lord Speaker explained that the paper *Refusing Access to the Parliamentary Estate* by Fay Tennet, Deputy Director of Security (Operations) (C/19-21/58), would be considered at a future meeting.

Lord McFall of Alcluith, Baroness Doocey and Mathew Duncan provided a short oral update on the meeting which took place on Friday with the Clerk of the Parliaments, the Director of Facilities and the Managing Director of Strategic Estates. They explained that the small group had agreed that a concrete action plan on the work of Strategic Estates would be provided for the next meeting of the Finance Committee.

The Lord Speaker thanked the Commission for agreeing the paper *Membership Changes to the Audit Committee* (C/19-21/54) by correspondence. The Lord Speaker thanked Liz Hewitt for her work chairing the Audit Committee and her work as a member of the Commission, and he thanked Mathew Duncan for agreeing to take over as Chair of the Audit Committee from January 2021.

**2. Quarterly Report R&R Programme: Q1 2020/21**

Paper by Sarah Johnson, CEO of R&R Sponsor Body  
C/19-21/55 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

The Lord Speaker began by explaining that the timetable for the final Strategic Review report may change because of recent discussions in the House of Commons Commission.

*[Restricted Access – More information].*

Commission members expressed concern at the Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority being asked to explore a fundamental review of the delivery strategy for the restoration of the Palace. Members spoke of inappropriate interference, the increasing risk of fire and mechanical and electrical failure and the unnecessary extra expense associated with exploring options which had been examined in detail in the past. There was a discussion about communicating this view to the House of Commons and, possibly, externally.

*[Restricted Access – More information].*

The Lord Speaker summarised the discussion and reminded the Commission of the content of the resolutions passed by both Houses in 2018, in particular [that both Houses accepted the]: "... clear and pressing need to repair the services in the Palace of Westminster in a comprehensive and strategic manner to prevent catastrophic failure ... [and that ] a full and timely decant of the Palace is the best and the most cost-effective delivery option, as endorsed by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority."

Sarah Johnson, Chief Executive of the Sponsor Body, said that a meeting would be taking place shortly with the Leader of the House of Commons and Mr Speaker and following that meeting they would be in a better position to provide an update to the Lords Commission. The Lord Speaker said that he would communicate the update to Commission members.

The Commission **took note** of the Quarterly Report.

**3. Update on the Strategic Review of the Restoration and Renewal Programme: Initial Findings, Outcome of Stakeholder Engagement and Next Steps**

Paper by Sarah Johnson, Chief Executive, and David Yass, Strategic Review Lead, R&R Sponsor Body  
C/19-21/56 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Items 2 and 3 were considered together. The Commission **took note** of the Update.

**4. Estimates Commission - Nomination of Members**

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park, Leader of the House of Lords  
C/19-21/57 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

The Leader of the House briefly introduced her paper and invited the Commission to nominate two members to the Estimates Commission, which had been established under the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Act 2019. The Commission **agreed** to nominate Lord McFall of Alcluith and Lord Macpherson of Earl's Court and **agreed** to the conditions of their terms in post as set out in the paper.

## 5. Update from Public Health England

Oral update from Dr Nick Gent, Deputy Head of the Emergency Response Department, Centre for Emergency Preparedness & Response, Public Health England, and Professor Virginia Murray, Senior Public Health Adviser and Head of Global Disaster Risk Reduction, Public Health England.

The Lord Speaker welcomed Dr Gent and Professor Murray to the meeting. Dr Gent explained the national situation in terms of the prevalence of the virus in population and the risk of transmission. He said that the R-rate had risen above 1, and the data showed an increase in the number of confirmed cases and daily infections.

In response to questions from the Commission members, about the causes of the change, the virulence of the virus, and the messaging to the public, Dr Gent stated:

- There was no evidence that the virus was less virulent (although there had been a genetic change in the virus). The reason for the lower initial hospital and death rates was due to the younger age profile of those infected;
- International comparisons suggested that the UK was on the same trajectory as Germany and would not see the same significant increase as France and Spain; and
- Whilst clinical and non-clinical interventions had improved, there remained a great deal which was unknown about the virus. One significant unknown was the interaction with winter 'flu and other seasonal respiratory infections.

*[Restricted Access – More information].*

Dr Gent explained the current testing technology available and its limitations. When asked whether a regular testing regime would allow more members to sit in the chamber, Dr Gent said that the number of false positives which could arise when testing the number of individuals involved could render the approach flawed. He underlined that in the hierarchy of controls, social distancing and the rule of six were the most effective tools for reducing the spread of the virus.

Dr Gent strongly suggested that it was not the time to reduce control measures in Parliament.

The Clerk of the Parliaments thanked Dr Gent for his update and said that in the light of the advice from Public Health England remaining the same, his recommendation was that the measures in Parliament should not be relaxed. He also explained the testing provision in Parliament.

The Lord Speaker thanked Dr Gent and Professor Murray and the Commission **took note** of the update.

**6. Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS): 18-Month Review Update**

Ed Ollard, Clerk of the Parliaments  
C/19-21/59 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

The Commission deferred consideration of this item and the Commission **agreed** to consider this paper by correspondence.

**7. Overseas Travel**

Ed Ollard, Clerk of the Parliaments  
C/19-21/60 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

The Commission deferred consideration of this item and the Commission **agreed** to consider this paper by correspondence.

**8. Update on the Administration**

Ed Ollard, Clerk of the Parliaments  
C/19-21/61 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

The Commission deferred consideration of this item and the Commission **agreed** to consider this paper by correspondence.

**Any Other Business**

The Lord Speaker informed Commission members that the next meeting would take place via Microsoft Teams on during the week commencing Monday 5 October and that details would be confirmed in due course.

Tuesday 15 September 2020

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