



Procedure Committee

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From the Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, Chair of the Committee

Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP
Speaker of the House of Commons
House of Commons

11 March 2020

Mr Speaker

The Procedure Committee has held intensive discussions on the possible impact on the House of any measures to delay the spread of coronavirus. We recognise that this is a fast-moving situation and that the position of the Government and the House authorities is kept under constant review in the light of official medical advice.

The Committee considers that some practical changes to House practices and procedures ought now to be considered for implementation in advance of any advice which would affect the way in which Members use the Chamber and the division lobbies.

In the event of medical advice to minimise the time Members spend in close proximity, steps should be taken to minimise the items of House business on which divisions have to be held. There will be items of business which do not need to be pressed to a division, and decisions which can be dealt with through deferred divisions.

Where divisions do have to be held, consideration ought to be given to changes in practice. In the event that medical advice is to restrict the time individuals are required to spend in close proximity, practical steps to comply with the advice might include a direction to Members not to enter the division lobbies until tellers are appointed. Both sets of doors could be locked when the division is called and only unlocked on the appointment of tellers. Time spent queuing in the lobbies could be minimised if the maximum time for voting were extended from eight to 12 minutes. Any changes ought of course to be made in the light of the medical advice available to the House.

We consider that where individual Members are absent from the House on coronavirus-related medical advice, they ought to be able to use proxies under the current arrangements for proxy voting for parental absence. Where large numbers of Members are absent for coronavirus reasons, administration of proxy voting under existing arrangements will be impractical. In these circumstances the usual channels will wish to arrange pairing. We recommend that the parties consider publishing lists of their Members who have been paired for this reason.

The Committee will continue to monitor the situation, and is ready to advise on any further changes to procedure and practice which may be necessary to ensure the continuation of House business in the event that the medical advice to the House authorities changes.

A copy of this letter goes to the Clerk of the House.

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Karen Bradley MP