



## 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

18 December 2020

Mr Speaker —

Earlier in the year the House worked quickly to respond to the emerging circumstances in which we suddenly found ourselves. This enabled continued sittings of the House in the face of a global pandemic and tribute has rightly been paid to the ingenuity and hard work of the House staff that made it so.

Since then, the practice of the House has changed significantly—not out of all recognition—but far enough for questions to be asked about whether, when and to what extent we would return to the state of affairs in place before March 2020.

Throughout my committee's scrutiny of procedure under coronavirus, we have consistently expressed the view that the procedural changes that have occurred since March have been agreed to on the basis of their being temporary.

Any permanent changes must be made consciously and by consensus. While between us we share many years' experience of this place before COVID-19 struck, we have 140 colleagues—a fifth of the House—whose experience of pre-pandemic Parliament is limited to 44 sitting days not including swearing-in and State Opening.

This is one of the reasons that it is far from obvious that in practical terms that we can revert overnight to the way things were without consequence. Further, the House has seen that allowing temporary orders to lapse without a plan is not the way that the affairs of this House should be conducted.

While it is too early to say precisely what form any work my committee carries out will take or when precisely it will start, I believe that we are at a point where it makes sense to begin to consider how we would initiate such work and what questions we would seek to answer.

With that in mind, I would welcome your thoughts, informed by the expertise of the House authorities, on the following matters:

- (1) Whether and how far distinctions can be drawn between procedural and practical considerations;
- (2) Where procedural changes made since March are governed by temporary orders, what the practical implications of those orders lapsing would be; and
- (3) Whether there are any matters which in your view, being essentially practical rather than strictly procedural, ought to be considered for retention.

I would also welcome your perspective on whether the nature of proceedings has changed materially under COVID restrictions. This is an issue that many Members elected prior to 2019 have raised with the committee.

I am copying this letter to the Leader of the House, at whose initiative any changes to Standing Orders would be made and whose views my committee would also welcome. I should like with your agreement to publish this letter, along with your reply, early in the new year.

My committee will then be able to take an informed decision on the terms of reference of any work we choose to launch in the spirit of the same consensus in which the changes last year were made. I am anxious—as I hope you are—to avoid a scenario in which the procedures of this House after coronavirus become something that divides hon. and Rt hon. Members.

I wish you and your family a happy and peaceful Christmas.

Yours ever —



**Rt Hon. Karen Bradley MP**