



HOUSE OF LORDS COMMISSION

Minutes

Tuesday 25 May 2021

Attendance

- Lord Speaker (Chairman)
- Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Deputy Chairman)
- Mathew Duncan (external member)
- Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
- Lord German
- Lord Hill of Oareford
- Lord Judge
- Lord Newby
- Nora Senior (external member)
- Baroness Smith of Basildon
- Lord Touhig
- Lord Vaux of Harrowden

Simon Burton, Clerk of the Parliaments, was in attendance. The meeting was held via Microsoft Teams.

The Lord Speaker welcomed Lord Gardiner of Kimble, the Senior Deputy Speaker and Nora Senior, the new external member, to the meeting. He explained that Susannah Street had been appointed as the new Commission Secretary, and that James Whittle had been appointed as the External Management Review Implementation Lead, and that both would assume their duties shortly.

The Lord Speaker outlined how he would like the Commission to work in the future. He made the following points:

- the political and administration leadership of the House should work together more closely;
- the Commission should re-affirm its role as the strategic body of the House and the role and responsibilities of the Commission should be examined as a matter of priority;
- the establishment of the Oversight Panel, as recommended by the External Management Review, would facilitate the Commission working in a new way;
- the Commission Secretariat, once in place, would act as the full-time, permanent resource, supporting the meetings and speaking with Commission members in between meetings and that regular communication between the Commission Secretariat and Commission members should make for better decision-making;
- Commission meetings should be sharper, shorter and focused on decision-making, not on lengthy discussion; and
- the papers provided for meetings should be shorter and more focused.

The Lord Speaker said that he would be speaking to Commission members in advance of the following meeting to hear their thoughts about how arrangements might be improved.

The Lord Speaker reminded Commission members that he had given notice of the decision to postpone consideration of the Steering Group for Change report (C/21-22/9) until a future meeting.

Finally, he said that there would be an additional, short meeting in the week commencing Monday 14 June, solely dedicated to Covid-19-related decisions which may need to be taken following any Prime Ministerial statement about step 4 of the Government's Covid-19 roadmap.

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Commission agreed the record of discussion of the previous meeting on 26 March 2021. He also thanked Commission members for agreeing a paper by correspondence earlier in the week, *COVID-19 Measures on the House of Lords Estate: Interim Decisions* (C/21-22/1).

2. COVID-19 Measures on the House of Lords Estate: Update

Simon Burton, Clerk of the Parliaments
C/21-22/2 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

International Travel

Jake Vaughan, Reading Clerk, Clerk of the Overseas Office and Director of Corporate Services
C/21-22/3 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

The Lord Speaker welcomed Professor John Simpson, Head of Public Health Advice, Guidance and Expertise Pillar at Public Health England, and Dr Mark Salter, Consultant in Global Health and Senior Medical Advisor at Public Health England, to the meeting. The Lord Speaker thanked them for Public Health England's work advising the House on arrangements relating to Covid-19 security ahead of the State Opening of Parliament.

Professor Simpson and Dr Salter explained that prevalence rates were low and that the vaccination programme was progressing well. They also spoke about the variant of concern known as the Delta Variant and the significant protection offered by the vaccines being provided as part of the vaccination programme. Finally, they commented on the significance of the Prime Minister statement, expected in the week commencing Monday 14 June, relating to step 4 of the Government's Covid-19 roadmap.

Lord Judge asked about the effect of the vaccines on the transmissibility of the virus. Professor Simpson said the picture was broadly positive but that he would respond in writing in more detail.

The Clerk of the Parliaments, Simon Burton, presented his paper and drew Commission members' attention to the figures showing weekly average Member attendance on the Estate and the use of the onsite rapid testing service and PCR tests.

Baroness Smith of Basildon spoke about the possible changes to how Parliamentary business was conducted and suggested that the Commission consider an options paper at the following meeting. She also said that testing capacity may need to be increased for Members returning to the Estate. There was also a discussion about the pace of change and at what moment the Hybrid model might end. The Leader of the House, Baroness Evans of Bowes Park, suggested that there was widespread agreement that the House had to recover many of the valuable things which had been lost as a result of the Hybrid House such as spontaneity and lively debate, whilst retaining some of the positive developments which had arisen as a result of the Hybrid House. She suggested that one way to manage the change and strike a balance might be to return to the previous operating model relatively quickly, and then reintroduce the recent positive developments where there was broad agreement. Lord Hill of Oareford agreed and highlighted some of the risks associated with the retention of the current Hybrid model. The Senior Deputy Speaker, Lord Gardiner of Kimble, said that the Procedure and Privileges Committee would take forward work in this area when the strategic direction and high-level decisions had been taken by the Commission.

The Commission **noted** the paper.

Jake Vaughan, Reading Clerk, Clerk of the Overseas Office and Director of Corporate Services, presented his paper. He explained that on 7 May, the Government had announced that, from 17 May, the rules prohibiting overseas travel save for specified purposes would be lifted. He invited the Commission to decide the rules and guidance for Parliamentary travel in the light of the new guidance.

The Commission **noted** the paper and **approved** the following travel policy:

Members and staff of the House may travel to green list countries for Parliamentary-related reasons, including official delegations, committees and inter-Parliamentary Groups where there is a clear business need for such travel. Such travel is voluntary, and there is no requirement to travel for either members or staff. The Administration will support Parliamentary travel to these countries, including making arrangements for any testing required prior to or after travel. This policy will be kept under review in the light of the changing guidance.

3. **Restoration & Renewal**

R&R: Financial Scrutiny

Lord Vaux of Harrowden, Chair of the Finance Committee
C/21-22/12 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Lord Vaux of Harrowden, Chair of the Finance Committee, presented his paper.

[Restricted Access – More Information].

He said that the role of the Commissions, as set out in the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Act 2019, was to approve the Phase One Expenditure Limit. He said that it was not anticipated that the Commissions would have a role in

reviewing the Annual Estimate, but that the decision to set the Phase One limit at the level of annual expenditure had led to a situation where the Commissions were being asked to review and approve what amounted to, in effect, the annual estimate for the Programme. He suggested that the Finance Committee should provide advice, in advance of any Commission consideration.

After discussion, the Commission **agreed** that the Finance Committee should review requests for funding within the Phase One Expenditure Limit, and that the Committee should provide advice to the Commission accordingly.

Quarterly Report: Q4 2020/21

Sarah Johnson, Chief Executive of the Sponsor Body, Cover note by Judith Brooke and Kate Meanwell, Lords R&R Directors

C/21-22/4 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

R&R Programme: Scheme Objectives and Phase I timeline

Paper by Sarah Johnson, Chief Executive of the R&R Sponsor Body, with Annexes A-C
C/21-22/5 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

R&R Programme Scheme Objectives and Phase I timeline: advice to the Commissions

Paper by Dr John Benger, Clerk of the House of Commons, and Simon Burton, Clerk of the Parliaments

C/21-22/6 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body: Main Supply Estimate 2021-22

Report, Estimate and cover note by Judith Brooke and Kate Meanwell, House of Lords R&R Directors

C/21-22/7 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Letter from Mr Speaker to Sarah Johnson, Chief Executive of the R&R Sponsor Body of 26 April 2021

C/21-22/8 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Sarah Johnson, Chief Executive of the R&R Sponsor Body, joined the meeting and presented her papers. Commission members asked questions about the relationship between the R&R Programme and Parliament's Masterplanning work. The Leader of the House and the Lord Speaker sought assurances that the two programmes were joined-up. After discussion, the Leader of the House asked for quarterly reports to be circulated promptly by correspondence.

The Commission **noted** the Quarterly Report.

On the R&R Programme Scheme Objectives and Phase I timeline, the Commission **noted** the advice provided by the Clerks of both Houses and **endorsed** the principles as set out in the Clerks' paper (C/21-22/6) as an appropriate framework for evaluating the scheme options, and **endorsed** the Programme's proposed Essential and Stretch Objectives for the R&R Programme as set out in the paper by Sarah Johnson, Chief Executive of the R&R Sponsor Body (C/21-22/5).

The Commission **noted** the main estimate 2021-22 for the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body and its scrutiny by the Parliamentary Work Estimates Commission.

The Commission **noted** the letter from Mr Speaker to Sarah Johnson, Chief Executive of the R&R Sponsor Body, of 26 April 2021.

4. Update on the Administration

Simon Burton, Clerk of the Parliaments
C/21-22/10 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

The Commission **noted** the Update.

5. Letter from the Lord Speaker, Lord Fowler, to Lord Mance, Chair of the Conduct Committee, of 30 April 2021

C/21-22/11 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

The Commission **noted** the letter.

6. Any Other Business and Next Meeting

A question was asked about whether hard copies of Commission papers could be provided in advance of meetings and when physical meetings would resume. Lord Gardiner of Kimble said that the Liaison Committee would be considering these matters, which affected all committees, and said that he would report back.

The Lord Speaker informed Commission members that, as agreed, the next meeting would take place via Microsoft Teams at some point during the week commencing Monday 14 June.

Tuesday 25 May 2021

Patrick Milner
Secretary to the Commission
020 7219 6644
milnerp@parliament.uk