

**HOUSE OF LORDS COMMISSION****Minutes**

Tuesday 15 June 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 said that Susannah Street had now assumed her post as Commission Secretary, and that he would continue to discuss the future operation of the Commission with individual Commission members. He noted the previous evening's statement from the Prime Minister on the continuation of pandemic restrictions.

**1. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Commission agreed the record of discussion of the previous meeting on 25 May 2021.

**2. COVID-19****Post-hybrid operating model for the Chamber and Grand Committee – initial decisions for the Commission**

The Lord Speaker  
C/21-22/13 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

**Operation of the Estate from Step 4**

Simon Burton, Clerk of the Parliaments, and Carl Woodall, Director of Facilities  
C/21-22/14 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

**Voting options – a note for the Commission meeting on 15 June**

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park, Leader of the House and Lord Privy Seal  
C/21-22/15 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

- A. The Lord Speaker welcomed Dr Mark Salter, Consultant in Global Health and Senior Medical Advisor at Public Health England. Dr Salter briefed the Commission on the current Covid situation across the UK.

*Returning to physical proceedings*

- B. The Commission discussed the operation of the Chamber and Grand Committee from September. The Lord Speaker had received differing representations from members on the House's post-pandemic operations. It was proposed that no changes should be made to the House's current arrangements before the House rose for the summer recess, and that, if 'step 4' in the Government's roadmap had been implemented, the Chamber would return to physical proceedings when it sat again in September.
- C. In discussion, it was suggested that there should be further consideration of areas of business where hybridity might be retained, and that Committees ought to be able to meet in a hybrid way. The Senior Deputy Speaker, Lord Gardiner of Kimble, noted that Committees should come to their own decisions on their working practices, which met with agreement.
- D. The Commission **agreed** that:
- (1) no changes should be made to the House's current arrangements before the House rose for the summer recess; and
  - (2) if 'step 4' in the Government's roadmap had been implemented before the House returned after the summer recess, the Chamber would return to physical (rather than hybrid) proceedings when it sat again in September.

*Voting*

- E. Baroness Evans spoke to the additional paper in her name which had been circulated before the Commission met (C/21-22/15). The House of Commons was moving to a new system for using pass-readers to record votes, and it was proposed that the House of Lords should join that endeavour, with the intention of using pass-readers for all voting from the autumn.
- F. Members discussed the location of pass-readers, and whether they should be limited to the division lobbies and a small area around the Chamber, perhaps including in the Royal Gallery, or more widely distributed on the Estate. It was argued that voting was a significant and public event, and voting members should be in or around the Chamber.
- G. A question was raised regarding the advantage of using pass-readers as opposed to clerks recording votes on digital devices in the division lobbies. However, the case was advanced that in the recent debate in the House on hybrid proceedings, reluctance had been expressed about returning to voting in the division lobbies, and the House should move forward in line with the mood of that debate. The arguments were made that the House should continue using PeerHub but requiring members to vote on the Lords Estate, and that disruption to Committee meetings would be reduced if Committee members continued to use PeerHub. Some members hoped that using multiple pass-readers would make divisions quicker.

- H. Members questioned whether the work could be delivered more quickly. The Clerk Assistant, Chloe Mawson, explained the expected timetable for delivery, including procurement, software development, testing, and installing infrastructure. The Commission would be provided with a cost analysis.
- I. Chloe explained the difficulties of quickly implementing a technological requirement for PeerHub based on location. Instead, the Code of Conduct could be amended to require voting members to be in a particular location; the Procedure and Privileges Committee would consider the detail of the implementation and the Conduct Committee would be asked to consider proposing the change to the Code.
- J. The Commission **agreed** that:
- (1) the House should move to using pass-readers to record votes, as part of a project involving both Houses to be delivered in the autumn;
  - (2) in the interim, after the House returned in September but before the pass-reader solution was available, members would continue to vote using PeerHub;
  - (3) after the summer recess, members should only vote on the Parliamentary Estate.

*Virtual participation by members with physical disabilities*

- K. The Lord Speaker proposed that a model should be developed to enable a small number of members with disabilities to continue to participate remotely. There was agreement that provision should be made available on the basis of physical disability but not frailty. The House should be accessible, and members with disabilities should not be forced to participate remotely. Care would be needed in defining the affected group.
- L. The Commission **agreed** that a model should be developed to allow a small number of members with disabilities to continue to participate remotely in at least some business, and that members likely to be affected should be consulted informally.

*The Moses Room*

- M. The Commission **agreed** that Grand Committees should resume in the Moses Room after the summer recess, and that the work required to equip the Moses Room to enable virtual contributions should be scoped and assessed, including costs.

*The operation of the Estate*

- N. The Clerk of the Parliaments, Simon Burton, presented the paper on the operation of the Estate once Covid-related restrictions were lifted. A question was asked about the future of the Long Room: Lord Touhig agreed to consider and report back. Questions were asked about non-passholder access to the Estate in the summer recess, mitigations other than social distancing, and access to the chapel: Simon would update the Commission once the Commons Commission had considered the issues.

- O. The Commission **agreed** the proposals in the paper, which were:
- When the Government guidance changed, removing social distancing on the Lords Estate and implementing the mitigations recommended by the guidance (but not before the House rose for the summer recess);
  - Ensuring that the guidance for members and members' staff on working from home remained in step with the Government guidance;
  - That from the summer recess more non-passholders would be allowed onto the Estate, and in particular that public tours of the Estate would recommence over the summer recess, and after the summer recess full non-passholder access would resume;
  - That accommodating inward international delegations with FCDO involvement would be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Lord Speaker on advice from the Clerk of the Overseas Office; and
  - That following the summer recess, non-passholders would be allowed access to the chapel for weddings and baptisms booked from September to December 2021.
- P. The Chair of the Services Committee had been consulted on the operation of catering venues.

### **3. Any Other Business and Next Meeting**

The Lord Speaker informed Commission members that, as agreed, the next meeting would take place via Microsoft Teams on Friday 25 June. Commission members expressed a strong preference for moving away from Friday meetings, and for meeting in person when this was possible.

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