



HOUSE OF LORDS COMMISSION

Draft Minutes

Tuesday 31 August 2021

Attendance

- Lord Speaker (Chairman)
- Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Deputy Chairman)
- 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

Apologies were received from Mathew Duncan (external member). Simon Burton, Clerk of the Parliaments, was in attendance. The meeting was held via Microsoft Teams.

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Commission **agreed** the record of discussion of the previous meeting on 19 July 2021.

2. COVID-19 measures during the House's September sitting

The Lord Speaker and the Clerk of the Parliaments
C/21-22/32 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

The Lord Speaker welcomed Dr Mark Salter and Professor John Simpson of Public Health England. Professor Simpson and Dr Salter briefed the Commission on the current Covid situation across the UK.

The Commission confirmed that the Chamber and Grand Committee would return to physical (rather than hybrid) proceedings from 6 September, except for the small number of members participating remotely on grounds of long-term disability. The Lord Speaker would discuss with the Senior Deputy Speaker the question of a limited expansion of the remote participation scheme (which was governed by standing order) and revert to the Commission. It was agreed that for the September sitting, members' attendance would be recorded in the Prince's Chamber and Peers' Lobby to avoid overcrowding in the Chamber.

The Commission agreed that members were still strongly encouraged to maintain a safe distance from each other and from staff. The Commission strongly encouraged and expected members to wear face coverings in the Chamber, Moses Room and Committee Rooms (except when speaking), any indoor crowded spaces and when

moving through catering venues and around the estate. Members, who would no longer be discouraged by the Commission from returning to the House, were encouraged to take a lateral flow test ahead of returning, and to continue to test twice a week when in Westminster.

Members would continue to be able to bring in one guest for business reasons. Access would be allowed for any passholder with a business need. If education visits could recommence under PHE advice this would be facilitated when possible, but other non-passholders seeking to access the estate, to visit or socialise or sit in a public gallery (including in Committee Rooms), would not be readmitted until at least after the conference recess. Committees were able to bring in non-passholders as required; non-member passholders could bring in guests only for essential business needs.

The Commission agreed that members should continue to hold meetings virtually where possible, especially when non-passholders were involved. Where there was a business need for a physical meeting, members were encouraged to do what they could to limit attendance and duration, and to maximise social distancing, ventilation, and the use of face coverings. Meeting rooms would have reduced capacity. Committees were able to meet virtually, in hybrid form or physically according to their wishes.

If more members were seeking to use a shared office than was recommended, members were encouraged to work in another area. Members were asked to use their judgment as to how many staff they believed could work safely in their offices under the guidance.

The Commission agreed the proposed arrangements for catering; after the meeting it was confirmed that the Barry Room would re-open at least initially. It was proposed that hospitality events would be resumed, as many were sponsored by members, but a number of mitigations would be undertaken, in line with the Government's guidance. The Chair of the Services Committee would review those mitigations with Facilities Department staff and further advise the Commission; after the meeting the reopening of hospitality events and the associated mitigations were confirmed.

The arrangements regarding international travel agreed by the Commission before the summer recess would remain unchanged until after the conference recess.

The Commission would further review arrangements before the House's return in October.

3. Any Other Business and Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 14 September.

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