



HOUSE OF LORDS SERVICES COMMITTEE

AGENDA ITEM 4

COVID-19 Update

Paper from Simon Burton, Clerk of the Parliaments

1. On 7 October the Lord Speaker communicated the latest arrangements relating to COVID-19, based on the decisions made by the Commission on 5 October. That communication is replicated below.
2. The Clerk of the Parliaments will provide verbal updates on more recent information in the meeting.

Simon Burton
Clerk of the Parliaments
October 2021

From the Lord Speaker: guidance for the House's return on Monday 11 October

Dear colleagues,

The Commission met on Tuesday and I wanted to share with you a further update on guidance for the House's return in October.

As always, the UK Health Security Agency (formerly Public Health England) joined our discussion. They outlined the ongoing high number of cases of COVID-19 across the UK, despite strong levels of vaccination and testing, and noted that the demographics of the Lords membership should continue to be taken into account. I can report that there has been a small but steady increase in cases reported across the Parliamentary estate, but due to the respect and care that members and staff alike have been showing, these numbers are still thankfully overall low.

We were reminded by the UK Health Security Agency that an additional threat to our business continuity is the onset of other winter respiratory infections, including flu. This was another factor the Commission carefully considered in reviewing the guidance, because of its potential impact on our staffing levels not just from illness, but from symptomatic people needing to test negative for COVID-19 before they can return.

All Parliamentary passholders can book a flu jab at Parliament in October and this is strongly recommended; make an appointment [here](#).

There have been some changes to the rules for working on the Lords' part of the estate which I outline below. We are looking to all passholders to take personal responsibility for everyone who shares our workplace. The overall advice remains to book a PCR test if you have symptoms, minimise contact, maximise ventilation and regularly wash your hands.

Everyone working on the estate, including members, are asked to take Lateral Flow Tests twice a week: we have increased our testing capacity by expanding the hours for the Bishops' Bar testing facility, and if you're testing at home instead we ask that you register your results (negative or positive) with us, please. More information and how to book is available on the [intranet](#).

Proceedings, voting and meetings

I can confirm that there are no further changes to the House business arrangements we had in September, including the continued use of PeerHub to record votes from a place of work on the estate, until we move to pass-reader voting. We also agreed that recording attendances in Prince's Chamber and Peers' Lobby should continue for now, to avoid overcrowding in the Chamber.

We ask that you consider holding meetings virtually where there would be no advantage from meeting physically. Fourteen of our meeting rooms now have the technology to support hybrid meetings with a further three expected shortly. More information on that can be found [here](#).

Access to the Estate

Members may now bring in up to six non-passholder guests. However, access to some areas of the estate will be limited (e.g. areas where Parliamentary proceedings are being conducted) and you are asked not to bring more than six non-passholder guests together in a meeting room. New members can now bring up to six guests into the gallery for their introduction.

Guidance on office doors about maximum occupancy will remain: members and members' staff are encouraged to distance and avoid crowding.

Members' staff may work on the estate where there is a business need, and members are asked to use their good judgement as to how many staff they believe can work safely in their offices.

Our search capacity is currently limited because security searching involves close contact and crowded areas, so our security lanes are having to work differently to keep everyone safe. Due to the constraint on capacity, and to reduce the risk of transmission by avoiding congestion in areas such as the Committee Corridor, non-passholders will not be permitted access. This includes members of the public wishing to attend Committee, APPG or other meetings.

Exceptions to this are members' guests (up to six), people required by Committees, and those booked for managed events such as education visits, tours and banqueting events. The reason for this is that visitors managed by our visitor service

teams are required to provide contact details and are escorted to managed areas of the estate, and the number of such visitors at the search points is controlled. We have decided to prioritise visitors whose access can be safely managed in this way, but we will keep this under review as more search capacity becomes available.

Numbers attending banqueting events are being limited to preserve search lane capacity for core Parliamentary business. Black Rod's Garden Entrance is a small space so members may wish to use Peers' Entrance and Chancellor's Gate to enter the Palace instead.

Our aim is to increase the House's engagement with the public where possible despite our current circumstances. That's why we have also asked the House authorities to explore options for introducing limited ticketed access to the Lords Chamber public gallery as soon as possible.

Face coverings

Individuals are encouraged to wear face coverings in line with current Government guidance. The Government expects and recommends that people continue to wear face coverings in crowded and enclosed spaces.

The high level of compliance in wearing face coverings in the Chamber and while moving around the estate is noticed and appreciated, including by members of the public watching our proceedings on TV and on social media.

All non-passholders will be expected to wear face coverings at all times on the estate, until seated in a room or inside a banqueting venue. A person who is a close contact of a positive case (and is allowed to return to the estate because they are fully vaccinated) will be expected to wear a face covering at all times.

All of the decisions above are aligned with the arrangements in place for the House of Commons. The complete details are [here](#).

Catering

Catering arrangements will largely return to pre-pandemic arrangements (subject to the ongoing rearrangement of the Peers' Dining Room to allow for the Bishops' Bar being used for testing), with the Barry Room reopening for evening service Monday-Thursday.

The Commission believe that these arrangements strike the right balance of returning to normal Parliamentary life whilst keeping ourselves and others safe.

Best wishes,

Lord McFall of Alcluith

Lord Speaker and Chair of the House of Lords Commission