



HOUSE OF LORDS COMMISSION

Minutes

Tuesday 5 October 2021

Attendance

- Lord Speaker (Chairman)
- Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Deputy Chairman)
- Mathew Duncan (external member)
- Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
- Lord German
- Lord Judge
- Lord Newby
- Lord Touhig

Apologies were received from Lord Hill of Oareford, Baroness Smith of Basildon, Lord Vaux of Harrowden and Nora Senior (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 14 September 2021.

2. COVID-19 measures and the return of the House in October 2021

Simon Burton, Clerk of the Parliaments
C/21-22/38 with Annex; HIGHLY RESTRICTED

- A. The Lord Speaker welcomed Professor John Simpson of the UK Health Security Agency. Professor Simpson briefed the Commission on the current situation across the UK with regard to COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.
- B. John Owen, Director of Strategic Business Resilience (based in the House of Commons) presented the paper. The Houses' joint Covid Strategy Group saw the current situation as fragile, as national COVID-19 cases continued to be reasonably high, and there were concerns about the impending flu and respiratory illness season, including impacts on staff availability due to both illness and to symptomatic people needing to test negative for COVID-19 before returning to the estate. There were also challenges in the supply chain for goods and services and a lack of catering agency staff. The search lanes were needing to work differently (as searching was a close-contact activity) so search capacity was limited, and there was a need to avoid congestion in key areas of the estate where visitors tended to gather, such as the Committee Corridor, so restoring full public access was not seen as feasible. It was therefore proposed that access should be facilitated where guests would be escorted and managed.

- C. The Lord Speaker noted the comments that had been provided by Baroness Smith, Lord Vaux and Lord Hill.
- D. The Commission agreed that the House's physical proceedings would not change. Members' attendance would continue to be recorded in the Prince's Chamber and Peers' Lobby (in addition to the usual arrangements) until the end of the year, to avoid overcrowding in the Chamber.
- E. Members could work on the estate; members' staff could work on the estate where there was a business need; House staff could work on the estate as agreed with their line managers; other passholder groups could work on the estate where there was a business need. For members and members' staff, where distancing could be maintained without an impact on business individuals were encouraged to distance, but this was not required where it would have an impact on business. Members were asked to use their good judgement as to how many staff they believed could work safely in their offices under the current guidance.
- F. Everyone was encouraged to use the full space of a room and distance where possible. It was agreed that those holding meetings were encouraged to consider holding them virtually where there would be no advantage from meeting on the estate. Committees would choose how they wished to operate. Bookable meeting rooms would continue to operate with a 20% reduction in capacity per room (this did not apply to the Chamber, Moses Room and Committee Rooms). The doors of the Moses Room would be kept open when the Grand Committee was sitting.
- G. The Commission agreed that individuals were encouraged to wear face coverings in line with current Government guidance. The Government expected and recommended that people continue to wear face coverings in crowded and enclosed spaces. Non-passholders would be expected to wear face coverings at all times on the estate, until seated in a venue/room or inside a banqueting venue, unless medically exempt or due to business reasons. Face coverings would also be expected at all times on the estate (unless medically exempt or due to business reasons) for individuals identified as close contacts of someone who had tested positive for COVID-19, roles which required close contact with others, and as directed as a public health measure. Commission members suggested that signage regarding the wearing of face coverings be increased, particularly at the main visitor entrance to the Lords.
- H. The Commission agreed that members could bring in up to six non-passholder guests. Access to some areas of the estate would be limited and members were asked not to bring more than six non-passholder guests together in a meeting room. Up to six guests could watch the introduction of a new member from the gallery.
- I. Staff could bring in visitors for essential business needs at all times; all non-member passholder groups could bring in visitors in line with pre-COVID arrangements on non-sitting days (subject to any issues being encountered regarding security capacity, supplies and staffing).
- J. Booked tours, education visits and events would continue (with reduced capacity); the Commission were informed that visitors for such events provided their

contact details and were escorted, and their arrival was controlled. Options for introducing limited pre-booked ticketed access for the Lords Chamber public gallery were being assessed. The Commission was updated on catering arrangements.

- K. All passholders were asked to take lateral flow tests twice a week if regularly attending the estate. Those testing at home were asked to register their test results with Parliament. Flu jabs were strongly recommended for all Parliamentary passholders.

3. Any Other Business and Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 19 October.

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