



HOUSE OF LORDS COMMISSION

Minutes

Thursday 2 April 2020

Attendance

- Lord Speaker (Chairman)
- Lord McFall of Alcluith (Deputy Chairman)
- Baroness Doocey
- Liz Hewitt (external member)
- Lord Judge
- Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall
- Lord Newby
- Baroness Smith of Basildon
- Lord Wakeham

The meeting was held via Skype for Business. Ed Ollard, Clerk of the Parliaments, was in attendance. Apologies were received from Mathew Duncan (external member), Lord Laming and Baroness Evans of Bowes Park.

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The Lord Speaker thanked Commission members for agreeing and endorsing a number of papers by correspondence including the *draft Parliamentary Relationship Agreement (PRA) (C/19-21/17)* and the *House of Lords Decant Project: Member Accommodation, Public Realm and Building Alterations, and forthcoming Member Engagement paper (C/19-21/18)*.

Lord Judge explained that a question he had submitted on the absence of a dispute resolution clause for the three accounting officers in the PRA had been answered.

The Commission agreed the minutes of the meeting on Wednesday 12 February 2020.

2. Restoration and Renewal Programme Estimate for 2020-21: Response from the shadow Sponsor Body

C/19-21/20 HIGHLY RESTRICTED

The Lord Speaker introduced this item. The Lord Speaker reminded the Commission that the paper reflected the revised request from Sarah Johnson, CEO of the shadow Sponsor Body, for £27.5m - three months' worth of funding for the Programme. The Lord Speaker explained that the House of Commons Commission agreed had to the request by correspondence the night before.

The secretary read comments submitted in writing from Lord Laming who said that the Commission should use this opportunity to restate the position they have taken in

the past, namely their general commitment to the Programme and their willingness to continue to fund it. The secretary also read comments submitted in writing from Mathew Duncan who said, from his experience, a long- term major project of this kind could not survive on interim short-term funding approvals. There was widespread approval for both points

Lord Newby argued that the two Commissions needed to have a joint conversation on this issue and Lord Judge suggested that that a letter be sent to the House of Commons Commission explaining the Lords Commission's position. Liz Hewitt expressed concern over the future of the project. Ms Hewitt agreed with Lord Judge that the Commission should write a carefully-crafted letter to the Commons Commission explaining that public money would be wasted if this approach continued. Baroness Smith of Basildon suggested that such a letter also request a joint meeting within three months and before the end of the three-month funding window.

The Commission, in line with the decision of the House of Commons Commission, **agreed** a revised estimate for the R&R Shadow Sponsor Body of £27.5 million for the first three months of the 2020-21 financial year. The Commission also **agreed** that the Lord Speaker should write to Mr Speaker underlining the Lords Commission's commitment to the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster on safety and heritage grounds, asking whether the Commons Commission continued to share this commitment and asking for a joint discussion of both Commissions on the future direction, funding and scope of the R&R Programme.

3. Any Other Business

In the light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Lord Speaker asked about the various digital solutions for remote working, both for parliamentary proceedings and for members' parliamentary work, and asked for views.

Baroness Smith of Basildon explained that a meeting that had taken place between the party leaders and Convenor, the Lord Speaker, the Senior Deputy Speaker and senior staff of the Administration. She said that the political leadership must be clear on what they would like in order for the House to continue to function. Lord Judge said that the group should be planning on the basis that the House may not be able to physically sit on the first sitting day after the Easter recess, 21 April, and said that in this scenario, members will have to be prepared to work differently. Lord Wakeham and Liz Hewitt both agreed that alternative working practices should be explored.

Lord Newby mentioned the Liberal Democrats party group meeting which had taken place via Zoom with over 70 participants and highlighted the importance of digital tools in the modern workplace. Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall suggested that solutions be developed which take into account the fact that some members of the House will be excluded from participating because of a lack of digital skills or because of limited access to satisfactory home broadband. Baroness Smith of Basildon suggested that the parliamentary calendar may change as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the changing ways of working.

Lord McFall of Alcluith explained that Microsoft Teams was being rolled-out to members and staff and that communications would follow soon.

4. Next meeting

The Lord Speaker informed Commission members that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 22 April 2020 at 10.30am via Microsoft Teams.

Thursday 2 April 2020

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