



HOUSE OF LORDS COMMISSION

Minutes

Tuesday 14 December 2021, 12pm

Attendance

- Lord Speaker (Chair)
- Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Deputy Chair)
- 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 welcomed Andy Helliwell, the incoming Chief Operating Officer, to the meeting. He also announced that, to make more space for discussion of the COVID-19 situation, the security briefing would be deferred.

Since the previous meeting, on 17 November the Commission had agreed to the recommendations in the paper '**Review of additional measures on the Parliamentary estate, 17 November 2021**' (C/21-22/51), that most of the additional COVID-19 measures that had been in place since 2 November should be lifted with immediate effect, and the operation of the estate should return to the level previously agreed by the Commission on 5 October, with two exceptions: that Chairs should continue to be asked to take an active role in ensuring committees were run safely, and that (as recently agreed by the Commission) the meeting room capacity limit would no longer apply for party/group meetings.

The Commission had also by correspondence agreed its report '**EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly**' (First Report of session 2021-22).

On 10 December the Commission had by correspondence considered the paper '**Considering new COVID-19 measures on the Parliamentary estate, 10 December 2021**' (C/21-22/61) which arose from cases on the estate and the Government's implementation of 'plan B', announced on 8 December. Tours had been stood down for Saturday 11 December. The Commission had agreed the communications to be sent to members, which said that members should follow the latest Government guidance with respect to their staff, who were advised to work from home where possible; and encouraged members to test regularly for COVID-19,

to keep a safe distance from others wherever possible on the estate, to wear face coverings on the estate in line with government guidance, and to hold meetings virtually unless there was a clear business need to meet in person. The Commission had also discussed whether the Woolsack Bar and River Restaurant Bar should be closed on the sitting days in the week beginning 13 December (see item 6 below).

1. Minutes of Previous Meetings

The Commission agreed the records of discussion of the meetings on 10 November and 16 November.

2. Medium Term Financial Plan

Fehintola Akinlose (Finance Director) and Claire Arlington (Head of Finance Business Partnering)

C/21-22/52 with five Annexes; HIGHLY RESTRICTED

2020-21 Forecast Outturn and Supplementary Estimate

Fehintola Akinlose (Finance Director), Jonathan Smith (Head of Finance) and Claire Arlington (Head of Finance Business Partnering)

C/21-22/53 with three Annexes; HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Update on the work of the Finance Committee

Lord Vaux of Harrowden (Chair of the Finance Committee)

C/21-22/54; HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Claire Arlington (Head of Finance Business Partnering) introduced the paper on the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), including the Medium Term Investment Plan (MTIP).

Ms Arlington and Fehintola Akinlose (Finance Director) updated the Commission on discussions in the House of Commons governance structure on the MTFP and funding for the Parliament Square Streetscape Project, and on the pay reserve.

[Restricted Access – More Information].

Lord Vaux noted that the Committee considered that accuracy in forecasting costs in In-House Services and Estates was improving. In the next year the Committee would work with the Finance team to target some Lords areas for zero-based reviews.

The Commission was told that the Commons Commission had approved the £3m funding for the Parliament Square Streetscape Project for 2022-23 and had requested that the Project Team provide that Commission with a breakdown of what the money would be spent on. This meant Parliament would be the sole funders of the Project in 2022-23.

After discussion regarding the pay reserve, the Commission approved the MTPF for 2022-23 to 2024-25, as recommended by the Finance Committee, including the adjustment to the pay reserve if confirmed by the House of Commons Commission. The Commission also noted the forecast outturn and approved the Supplementary

Estimate, as recommended by the Finance Committee, and noted the update on the work of the Finance Committee.

3. Security briefing

Alison Giles (Director of Security for Parliament)
C/21-22/55; HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Consideration of this item was deferred.

4. Restoration and Renewal: Update on the House of Lords Decant Project

Sarah Johnson (Chief Executive Officer, R&R Sponsor Body) and Amanda Colledge (Business Case Director, R&R Sponsor Body)
C/21-22/56 with two Annexes; HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Sarah Johnson (Chief Executive Officer of the R&R Sponsor Body) presented the paper updating the Commission on the progress of plans to refurbish the QEII Conference Centre for the purposes of the House of Lords decant, and setting out the process undertaken to identify a short-list of options which were being considered as part of the project Business Case. The Sponsor Board was expected to take an in-principle decision on the preferred option in February, and engagement would follow in the spring with Lords members and staff and the Lords governance structure.

The Commission discussed the update, noting that the costs provided were construction costs and did not include acquisition costs (the Administration was handling that aspect of the project). Commission members expressed a desire for some medical support facilities to be accommodated in the building, and for the information in the spring to include data about the cost of furnishing the building.

The Commission noted the update, including the short-list of four options determined as operationally viable by the Lords Administration and the initial construction cost estimates; the requirements and steers previously given to the R&R Programme for the decant project; the member-facing services and facilities that were not currently proposed for inclusion within the QEII; and the areas requiring further development and consultation. Members were encouraged to request further briefings from the Sponsor Body.

5. Report from the Additional Support Group

Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Senior Deputy Speaker)
C/21-22/57 with two Annexes; HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Arrangements for virtual participation by disabled members: allowances

Simon Burton (Clerk of the Parliaments)
C/21-22/58; HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Also relevant:

Letter from Lord Shinkwin to the Lord Speaker, 15 November 2021
Letter from the Lord Speaker to Lord Shinkwin, 26 November 2021
Letter from Lord Shinkwin to the Lord Speaker, 6 December 2021

The Senior Deputy Speaker presented the report from the Additional Support Group; when the role of the Group had been changed in July the Group had been invited to report back to the Commission before the end of the year on the operation of the remote participation scheme.

The Commission noted the work of the Additional Support Group to date; confirmed that the system of virtual participation should be retained only for members who may be physically unable to attend the House on grounds of long-term disability; agreed to issue further communications about wider accessibility issues within the House; and agreed to amend the Group's Terms of Reference to replace paragraph 8 with the following text: "The Clerk of the Parliaments shall attend meetings of the Group. The Finance Director or Head of Finance shall attend meetings when financial requests are being considered."

Commission members discussed virtual participation and allowances. Issues had been raised regarding the allowances claimable by members who were eligible to participate virtually in the Chamber and Grand Committee on grounds of long-term disability; such members who acted as whips remotely; and such members who gave notice that they wished to ask a supplementary oral question but were not called.

The Commission commissioned further work to fully explore these issues, which were complex. Further detailed information was requested on the history and original purpose of the attendance allowance, and the legal and tax aspects of the system. This work would encompass remote participation, remote whipping, and remote members who gave notice of wishing to ask a question but were not called.

[Restricted Access – More Information].

6. Update on COVID-19

Simon Burton (Clerk of the Parliaments)
C/21-22/59 with Annex; HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Professor John Simpson and Dr Mark Salter of UKHSA updated the Commission on the COVID-19 outbreak on the estate, and the national situation regarding the new omicron variant.

Simon Burton (Clerk of the Parliaments) presented the paper. An upsurge of cases connected to the estate had been recorded on 13 December: education events had been stood down, and Mr Burton had decided to cancel banqueting with immediate effect for the rest of the week; the Clerks of both Houses had also decided to cancel all tours with immediate effect. The River Restaurant Bar had been closed with immediate effect; controls were in place to manage custom in the Woolsack Bar. The Commission noted the actions taken by the Clerk of the Parliaments in response to the current high case numbers.

The Commission agreed that members bringing non-passholders onto the estate should ask them to take a lateral flow test and receive a negative result before entering. It decided that all other non-passholder access which was not for essential Parliamentary business – such as for Chapel services and ceremonies – should be

stopped; agreed that Committees should be asked to meet virtually with immediate effect; agreed that, subject to agreement with the Commons, education visits should not take place in the week beginning 3 January; agreed that members' attendance should continue to be recorded in the Prince's Chamber and Peers' Lobby (in addition to the usual arrangements) until the February recess to avoid overcrowding in the Chamber; and noted that ticketed access to the public gallery remained on hold.

Case numbers connected to the estate would be reviewed each Wednesday through the recess. The Commission did not agree the proposed arrangements for the recess set out in paragraph 18 of the paper and instead agreed that it would meet to discuss the arrangements for the House's return before the end of the recess. Commission members asked that a longer-term plan for the management of cases on the estate should be drawn up, including plans for the actions that would be taken under different scenarios. The Commission was assured that it would be possible for the House to return to hybrid operations quickly if necessary. Arrangements for the House's return would include considering whether members should be able to bring in up to six guests, or whether that number should be changed.

Commission members urged that communications to members about the current situation should be issued as soon as possible.

7. Any Other Business and Next Meeting

The Lord Speaker noted that he had received representations from some members about the House's membership of the Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme. The Clerk of the Parliaments was the statutory employer of all staff of the House and as such continuing membership of the Programme was something to be determined by the Administration rather than the Commission. The membership was due for renewal or termination in February 2022 and this would be considered by the Director of Human Resources. The Lord Speaker asked the Clerk of the Parliaments to keep the Commission informed.

The next meeting was scheduled for 17 January 2022, but an additional meeting before the return of the House on 5 January would be arranged.

Also circulated for information:

- **Clerk of the Parliaments' Monthly Update**
Simon Burton (Clerk of the Parliaments)
C/21-22/60; RESTRICTED

Susannah Street
Secretary to the Commission