

HOUSE OF LORDS COMMISSION**Minutes****Monday 3 January 2022, 10.30am****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, and Andy Helliwell, Chief Operating Officer, were in attendance. The meeting was held via Microsoft Teams.

The Lord Speaker welcomed Andi Helliwell. The Lord Speaker noted that, pending the recruitment of Susannah Street's successor as Commission Secretary, the Commission will be temporarily supported by Michael Torrance and Sarah Jones.

I. Covid-19 Update

Simon Burton (Clerk of the Parliaments)
C/21-22/61; HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Simon Burton (Clerk of the Parliaments) presented the paper, which covered steps to reduce transmission on the estate and the decisions required to inform the Administration's staff and resource planning to support the House's core areas over the next few weeks. He was monitoring the impact of Covid-19 on the staff resource. He invited the Commission to consider recent decisions in the House of Commons, which were not covered by the paper.

Professor John Simpson (UKHSA) provided a short overview of the epidemiological situation regarding the Omicron variant. The national advice to large employers was to protect their core activity. In this respect, the most important issue for Parliament was likely to be the number of staff absences resulting from illness or the need to isolate. His advice to the Commission was to retain the restrictions agreed before Christmas until the high Omicron rates began to reduce. Regular testing, including before individuals come onto the estate, would play an important role.

John Owen (Parliament's Director of Strategic Business Resilience) provided an update on recent decisions taken in the House of Commons, including confirming the

continued cancellation of tours, visits and some catering operations. The Commons Commission was due to discuss the current situation at its meeting tomorrow.

To protect the core business of the House, the Commission agreed that:

- Members planning to be on the estate when the House returns must take a test which is negative on the morning before travelling to Westminster where possible, then continue to test regularly thereafter, including using on-site testing services, with any positive results notified to the Parliamentary test and trace team;
- Following agreement by the Commons, banqueting, tours and education visits should be cancelled until further notice;
- Subject to agreement by the Commons, private services and ceremonies in St Stephen's Chapel on non-sitting days should be allowed to continue, subject to the usual risk assessments, and weekly services should continue to take place in person, subject to appropriate mitigations including capacity limits and recording of names of attendees;
- The Clerk of the Parliaments will consider further whether visitors to the Archives searchroom should be permitted before a decision is taken;
- Noting the position in the Commons, guidance should be changed to allow Members to bring a maximum of two non-passholders onto the estate for business purposes only. (Ministers would still be able to bring more than two civil servants on site for business reasons when required.) Guests should be asked to take a test which is negative before entry;
- Committees should be asked to continue to meet virtually until further notice;
- Current guidance on other meetings should be retained, including holding these virtually, unless there is a clear business need to meet in person;
- Members should continue to vote from a place of work on the estate, using PeerHub, and capacities in the Chamber and Moses Room should remain as before the Christmas recess, but this will be kept under review. The air quality in the Moses Room will be monitored;
- The proposals for catering outlets, including closing the River Restaurant Bar and the Woollsack, which will be kept under review subject to staff resources;
- Noting the position in the Commons, and the current government guidance, Members' staff should continue work from home if they can but could work on site if necessary, and this is for Members to manage with their employees; and
- Subject to agreement by the Commons, individuals ending isolation after seven days, following two negative lateral flow tests, should only come onto the estate if it is absolutely necessary and remain cautious, for example, by avoiding meeting rooms and catering outlets.

The Commission agreed to communicate these arrangements to Members on the day of the meeting.

The Commission agreed to review these arrangements at the end of January.

2. Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for 17 January 2022.

Michael Torrance
Interim Secretary to the Commission