



HOUSE OF LORDS COMMISSION

Minutes

Tuesday 8 February 2022, 11.30am

Attendance

- Lord Speaker (Chair)
- Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Deputy Chair)
- Mathew Duncan (external member) – *virtually*
- Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
- Lord German
- Lord Hill of Oareford
- Lord Judge
- Lord Newby
- Baroness Smith of Basildon
- Lord Touhig
- Lord Vaux of Harrowden

Apologies were received from Nora Senior (external member). Simon Burton, Clerk of the Parliaments, and Andy Helliwell, Chief Operating Officer, were in attendance.

Since the previous meeting, on 24 January the Commission had by correspondence considered the paper ‘**COVID-19 Update**’ (C/21-22/66) which arose from the Government’s changes to Covid-19 guidance on 20 January. The Commission had agreed by correspondence that from 24 January Members could bring up to six guests onto the estate, regardless of their purpose, and Committee meetings could take place either physically, virtually or in a hybrid manner, subject to the decision of the committees themselves. The Commission agreed that from 31 January banqueting events, tours and education visits would resume; the River Restaurant bar and the Woolsack bar would re-open, and the Barry Room would remain closed at lunchtime. The guidance on testing and face coverings and room capacity limits would remain in place. Members’ attendances would continue to be recorded in the Prince’s Chamber and Peers’ Lobby until further notice. Working from home guidance for Administration staff was updated to reflect the change to national guidance and Members’ staff would no longer need to work from home if they can, though their working arrangements were for agreement with their respective Members (as their employers). The Commission also agreed to issue a comprehensive communication to members about the new arrangements on 24 January.

I. Minutes of Previous Meetings

The Commission agreed the record of discussion of the meeting on 17 January 2022.

2. Restoration and Renewal: Governance and Next Steps

Andy Helliwell (Chief Operating Officer)
C/21-22/67; HIGHLY RESTRICTED

Also relevant:

House of Commons Commission decisions, 1 February 2022

Andy Helliwell presented his paper, which considered the proposed changes to the governance of the R&R programme by the House of Commons Commission. Significant decisions were required on governance, but these did not directly address the issue of programme delivery. The proposed changes also required, but currently lacked, independent assurance; this was being sought. There was a risk that decisions made in haste could impact their quality. There were considerable communications challenges arising from this matter. The Public Accounts Committee was due to hold a hearing on the programme in March.

The Commission:

- a. noted that the House of Commons Commission was seeking its views on changes to the sponsor function, and the governance of that sponsor function, including the steps that would be required under the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Act 2019 to implement any changes.
- b. agreed to replace the Sponsor Body but not until further consideration had taken place and agreement had been reached on what should replace it, based on independent advice and assurance. In the meantime, the Sponsor Body should pare down its activities to focus solely on essential work, under the continued oversight of the Sponsor Board. The Delivery Authority should focus on intrusive surveys and other necessary work to enable progress in the meantime and to inform future decisions on the next steps. The programme required clear strategic direction from both Commissions.
- c. noted the potential timescale that had been set out in the case that both Houses were to agree to proceed with the approach put forward by the House of Commons Commission. The Committee agreed that given the importance of establishing robust governance arrangements, the next steps should proceed as quickly as possible but further consideration and discussion, including between the two Commissions, was required before determining the next steps.
- d. agreed to re-state its commitment to the works to protect the future of the Palace of Westminster but noted that this should be informed by a wider range of options for delivering the work.
- e. agreed to communicate its decisions to Members and externally as soon as possible.

3. Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for 21 February 2022.

Michael Torrance
Interim Secretary to the Commission