

Written evidence submitted by Dr John Benger, Clerk of the House of Commons (CVR 85)

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to give evidence, alongside Mark Hutton, to the Procedure Committee on 1 June 2020. I found it a useful and informative exchange.

During that session I promised to provide the Committee with some further information and I am writing to do that now.

- **Categories of passholders**

During the session I referred to different categories of passholders accessing the estate (Q19 in the [transcript](#)). One category I referred to as “the mysterious others category, about which I am not quite clear—sorry—will rise to 120.” I can now confirm that that category included members staff and some third parties, such as Royal Mail.

- **What difference would a 1m social distancing rule make to the number of Members in the chamber**

1m social distancing applied would create another 37 spaces in the chamber.

- **What work has been done regarding estate facilities and smaller offices**

A review of all of the Estate has taken place as part of the preparations to the Estate becoming COVID-secure, a status which has been in place since the return from recess. Social distancing measures have been applied to areas of the estate as they have been required for use again. This has ensured that suitable office accommodation exists for every Member in conjunction with the accommodation whips, particularly for those Members who share office space with each other ordinarily. The planning has been carried out on the basis that Members’ staff should not be attending the Estate as outlined by the Leader and Speaker. Where social distancing has not been possible to maintain, such as in catering venues, additional protective measures have been installed.

Work is currently underway to model the impact of a reduction to 1 or 1.5 m within the social distancing guidance which is expected to be complete in w/c 22nd June. Whilst a reduction in the distances will create additional capacity on the Estate, these may still be accompanied by restrictions on the period of time individuals can spend within a reduced distance of each other. Should this be the case any increase in capacity is likely to be extremely limited - less than 10%

- **Modelling of the required staff against the number of Members.**

We use the total number of passholders accessing the Estate as a basis for ensuring that there are appropriate numbers of support staff (in roles such as security and catering). This takes into account the number of Members on the estate but also other users such as parliamentary staff and construction staff. We are ready to support the return of all Members but based on current calculations our assumption is of around 450 Members on the Estate.

- **How the House would react to test & trace measures**

Public Health England will lead any contact tracing for a confirmed case. The House would provide any assistance as requested, which may include identification of individuals where close contact may have occurred. It is expected that the level of tracing within parliament should be minimal, on the assumption that those on the estate have been maintaining social distancing thus cannot be defined as a close contact (A close contact involves either face to face contact or spending more than 15 minutes within 2 metres of an infected person.)

- **Ongoing monthly cost of proceedings – these are the costs of proceedings in the Chamber**

Monthly Running costs	
Specialist Operating team	£88,000
Technical infrastructure hire	£168,500
Remote broadcasting provision for Ministers and other key Members	£35,000
Zoom Usage licences	£200
Additional internet bandwidth	£3,000
Exc. Total	£294,700
<i>(all supplier costs concerned, excluding any capital costs, are VAT recoverable)</i>	

I hope I have addressed all outstanding queries but do not hesitate to contact me should there be any further information you require.