



Speaker's House House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

The Speaker

14 April 2020

Dear colleague,

As we approach the return of the House after the Easter recess I wanted to update you on discussions that have been taking place over the last two weeks about how the House can return to its important work on 21 April in a way that allows Members to hold the Government to account and us all to comply with the important public health guidance in the current crisis.

The proposal

Planning for certain parts of House business to be taken virtually is progressing well. The main aspect of the proposal will allow oral questions (including PMQs), urgent questions and statements to take place at the beginning of each sitting day by video link.

The order of these proceedings may be varied to suit circumstances, but they will be broadcast / webcast as live. The scale of the challenge means there are bound to be bumps along the way, but once these proceedings have been judged to be delivered in a satisfactory and sustainable way, both from a technological and participatory point of view, then the House can consider extending the model to other proceedings such as debates on motions and consideration of legislation.

Separately, I am aware of interest among colleagues in the possibility of using technology to allow Members to participate in divisions without being present on the Estate. There is a wide range of views on the merits of changing the House's longstanding voting arrangements, and it would be for the House itself to agree any change. In the meantime, I have asked the House Service and the Parliamentary Digital Service to undertake preparatory work as a matter of urgency on a system of remote voting in divisions of the House.

Timeline for consideration and approval by the House

I have approved a 'draft operating model' developed by the House Service for how these arrangements will work in the Chamber in practice. This document is now with the government and main Opposition parties for review. The Procedure Committee will be asked to consider the model at its virtual meeting on Wednesday 15 April and give its opinion and recommendations for implementation. I expect the Chair of the Committee to write to me to indicate the Committee's view. The Committee is also expected to publish a report advising the House on its evaluation on Monday 20 April.

On Thursday 16 April the House of Commons Commission will meet virtually to consider the model for approval, along with the views of the parties and of the Procedure Committee. If the Commission approves the model, having made any changes following that review, it would then be for the Leader of the House, following further consultation with the parties, to put forward motions setting out any temporary arrangements, for the House to consider on 21 April. I recognise the urgent need to put new

arrangements in place and will do everything I can to ensure the House is presented with the opportunity to take a decision on this matter sooner rather than later, giving the House as much advance notice as I am able to do in these exceptional circumstances.

I will send out more detailed information about the proposals after the Commission meeting on Thursday 16 April, but I must reiterate that it is for the House to decide, in accordance with existing processes, the way forward once it returns from 21 April.

There has been a huge amount of work undertaken over the last few weeks by the House Authorities, particularly by the Broadcasting Team and the Parliamentary Digital Service, to adapt the technology we already use and to bring in new technology to allow our work to take place in a virtual setting. I know you will all join me in thanking those who have been working so hard on our behalf. Whilst this work is being done at pace, I would ask for your understanding and patience as we all work to deliver new ways of working over the weeks ahead.

Warm regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lindsay Hoyle', is centered on a white rectangular background.

Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle
Speaker of the House of Commons