



The Lord Speaker

Tuesday 17 March 2020

Dear colleagues,

Mr Speaker and I wrote to you at the end of last week to explain the steps we are taking to ensure that both Houses can continue to sit at such a challenging time for the nation. The Government have now issued new advice and it is right that we respond by taking further action here in Westminster. As the Prime Minister stated yesterday, we are now all involved in national fightback against the virus. Parliament will continue to sit, but the way we operate will have to change.

In addition to the measures we announced last week about official travel and access to the Parliamentary Estate:

- Non-essential access to the Parliamentary Estate for non-passholders will now cease;
- Access to the public galleries and side galleries of both Chambers will be restricted for use by Members only;
- Non-passholders will not be admitted to observe select committee proceedings but witnesses will still be able to attend;
- Democratic access tours arranged by Members will be cancelled and no further bookings will be taken;
- The Parliamentary Education Centre will close, educational and school visits will cease and no further visits will be arranged; and
- There will be certain changes to the catering provision on the Parliamentary Estate and further details will be communicated by the Administration later today.

We have taken these decisions, which are consistent with the latest Government advice, in consultation with Public Health England and the measures are supported by the Parliamentary authorities. They are, in our view, necessary to allow Parliament to continue to fulfil its important constitutional duties, but the arrangements will be kept under constant review. I would like to thank you again for your co-operation.

The Government have also issued specific advice about social distancing for those over 70 and those with specific underlying health conditions. Obviously, this has particular implications for members of this House. I would like to emphasise one point: no-one should consider it is their duty to be here in these circumstances. As Parliamentarians we also have a duty to show leadership and heed the advice of the public health experts. In my view, Public Health England, the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Adviser are serving our nation well. I would ask that everyone now reflects on their own situation in the light of their advice and the broader public interest.

Yours sincerely,

The Rt Hon. The Lord Fowler
Lord Speaker