

Modernisation Committee

Virtual participation by Members in select committee meetings

Second Report of Session 2024–26

HC 1827

Modernisation Committee

The Modernisation Committee is a cross-party committee of MPs that considers reforms to House of Commons procedures, standards, and working practices.

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Powers

The powers of the Committee are set out in the order of the House of 25 July 2024, which is available here – https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmstords/addendum/so_add_250501.pdf

Publication

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Report

Introduction

1. At present, virtual participation by Members in House of Commons select committee meetings is not permitted. Instead, Members must be physically present in the room. This is not the case for witnesses, who now routinely give oral evidence virtually during select committee meetings.
2. In our Report, we propose that virtual participation by Members in select committee meetings should be possible in future, for limited and specific purposes. Firstly, for business continuity purposes, when access to the parliamentary estate is significantly restricted or prevented entirely, and secondly, when reasonable adjustments need to be made for an individual committee member on the grounds of health and wellbeing, following the conclusion of an assessment process that will be set out in guidance. Our expectation is that virtual participation will not be commonplace.

The case for change

3. Between October and December 2024, we held a ‘call for views’ consultation exercise, seeking input from individuals and groups inside and outside the House of Commons on the issues that we should prioritise as we developed our work programme. Under our strategic aim of ‘reforming parliamentary procedures to make the House of Commons more effective’, we received evidence calling for Members to be allowed to join formal select committee meetings virtually.
4. In their evidence, the House of Commons Administration cited the benefits for business resilience of allowing Members to join select committee meetings virtually. They commented that such a provision would “make it easier for Committees to meet when access to the estate was restricted or prevented entirely.” They added: “This would have significant benefits in improving business resilience and in allowing Committees to respond in a more agile way to unforeseen events.”¹

1 House of Commons Administration ([WOCO345](#)) para 26

5. The House of Commons Administration noted that “following the COVID-19 pandemic several parliaments have permanently adopted procedures which allow for hybrid or virtual Committee proceedings.”² The Administration also noted that virtual participation in select committees is permitted in the House of Lords, and in joint committees, which have both Commons and Lords Members, such as the Joint Committee on Human Rights.
6. As well as providing business resilience, virtual participation in select committees could allow Members who are undergoing treatment for, or recovering from, an illness or injury, or who have a long-term health condition, to continue to take part in select committee meetings.
7. With this in mind, our December 2025 Report on ‘Access to the House of Commons and its Procedures’ discussed the introduction of virtual participation by Members in select committee meetings in the context of facilitating the participation of Members who require reasonable adjustments, and noted that we were working with the Liaison Committee to explore whether Members should exceptionally be allowed to participate virtually in such meetings.³
8. When Baroness Brinton gave evidence to the inquiry into ‘Access to the House of Commons and its Procedures’, she stated that in the House of Lords “hybrid is extremely helpful because we have two Peers ... who require oxygen and various other things and cannot particularly go out at night. It gives them a chance to participate”.⁴
9. We acknowledge that not everyone who has a serious illness or injury, or a long-term health condition, will want, or be able, to continue to take part in select committee meetings and we emphasise that there should be no pressure on them to do so. However, the benefits virtual participation brings for those who do wish to do so are clear.
10. We recognise that as well as benefits, virtual participation can bring drawbacks, both in terms of the risk of technological failure and in a reduction of the immediacy of a discussion or exchange. This is why we have chosen to focus on the two specific situations set out above in which we believe the benefits of virtual participation outweigh the drawbacks.

2 House of Commons Administration ([WOCO345](#)) para 27. The examples listed are: provisions in the Senedd for virtual and hybrid meetings; provisions in the Scottish Parliament allowing for hybrid Committee meetings; provisions in the Canadian House of Commons for Members to participate in Committee business remotely so long as they are in Canada, and provisions for witnesses to appear remotely; provisions for hybrid and virtual proceedings for Committees in the Australian House of Representatives.

3 Modernisation Committee, First Report of Session 2024–26, Access to the House of Commons and its Procedures, HC 755, para 114

4 Oral evidence taken on 20 May 2025, [Q60](#)

11. We met Dame Meg Hillier MP, Chair of the Liaison Committee, and Cat Smith MP, Chair of the Procedure Committee, on 3 June 2025 and discussed the principles that should underpin virtual participation by Members in select committees. We also heard from James Rhys, the Managing Director of the Select Committee Team, about the procedural and practical implications of the proposed change.

Accompanying guidance

12. We asked Dame Meg Hillier if the Liaison Committee would draw up guidance on how the virtual attendance of Members at formal select committee meetings could operate.
13. The Liaison Committee's guidance, which was agreed on 10 February 2026 and is included as an appendix to this Report, reflects the discussion on 3 June 2025 and other discussions within the Liaison Committee. It is intended to give committees, chairs and committee staff, clarity on the considerations that should be borne in mind when facilitating virtual participation by Members. It has been drafted to ensure the propriety and confidentiality of parliamentary proceedings.
14. The Liaison Committee's guidance covers the following points, among others:
 - In-person participation remains the default position.
 - Both in-person and virtual participants will count towards the quorum of the committee, but for hybrid meetings committees should aim to achieve a quorum in the room and there is a presumption that the chair will be present in the room.
 - In instances where access to the parliamentary estate is restricted or prevented entirely, the instruction that some or all Committees may be allowed to meet virtually on a temporary basis will come from the Chair of the Liaison Committee, or in the absence of the Chair, an appointed deputy. If the Liaison Committee has not been appointed yet, the instruction may be given by the Leader of the House.
 - Individual chairs will not be expected to act as arbiters of whether virtual participation is an appropriate accommodation for health and wellbeing. Members who need to participate in formal committee meetings virtually for health and wellbeing reasons will need to follow the process set out in the guidance.
 - Members participating virtually must be in a secure location and use a hard-wired, fast internet connection.

- Any conduct by virtual participants that results in the leaking of information about private committee proceedings may be treated as a contempt of the House.
 - Virtual participation cannot be guaranteed, and there may be practical constraints on the number of concurrent virtual meetings that can be supported. If a decision needs to be made on prioritisation, it will be made by the Chair of the Liaison Committee.
- 15.** As the author and owner of the guidance, it will be for the Liaison Committee to review how the guidance is functioning and to make changes as it sees fit. The Liaison Committee has said it will do this within 18 months.
- 16.** We wrote to the Chair of the Procedure Committee setting out our virtual participation proposals and a copy of the Liaison Committee’s guidance and she wrote to us to pass on the Procedure Committee’s “support for the proposals and for the draft guidelines.”⁵

Next steps

- 17.** Annexed to this Report is a Motion that our Chair will bring forward in his capacity as Leader of the House of Commons, once any additional practical and technical arrangements the House administration considers necessary to support the proposed change are in place. If the Motion is agreed by the House, it will result in a change to Standing Orders to allow virtual participation by Members in select committee meetings in the circumstances specified above, on a pilot basis until the end of the current Parliament. A decision will need to be made in the new Parliament, using the evidence built up during the pilot period, about whether this is a change that the House wants to make on a permanent basis. We are grateful to the Procedure Committee for indicating that it would be happy to be involved in the review of the operation of the pilot, and agree that a thorough and timely review is important.⁶

5 Letter from the Chair of the Procedure Committee, 25 March 2026

6 Letter from the Chair of the Procedure Committee, 25 March 2026

18.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that physical participation in formal select committee meetings should remain the default position, but that, on a pilot basis until the end of the current Parliament, Members should be allowed to join select committee meetings virtually in two specific circumstances. Firstly, for business continuity purposes, when access to the parliamentary estate is significantly restricted or prevented entirely, and secondly, when reasonable adjustments need to be made for an individual committee member on the grounds of health and wellbeing, following the conclusion of an assessment process that is set out in Liaison Committee guidance.

Annex: Draft motion

Select Committees (Participation)

That the following Standing Order be made and shall have effect for the duration of the current Parliament:—

(1) Select committee members may in the circumstances set out in paragraph 2 below participate in any select committee proceedings through electronic means of communication in accordance with guidance to be determined and published by the Liaison Committee, which must take into account the need for cyber security.

(2) The circumstances in which this Standing Order applies are:

- a.** when access to the estate is significantly limited or prevented entirely; or
- b.** when reasonable adjustments need to be made for an individual committee member on the grounds of health and wellbeing, following the conclusion of an assessment process as set out in the Liaison Committee guidance.

(3) A Member participating through electronic means in accordance with this Standing Order shall count toward the quorum of the Committee.

(4) The provisions of this Standing Order apply to meetings held under the provisions of Standing Order No. 137A (Select committees: power to work with other committees).

(5) This Standing Order applies to all select committees appointed under Public Business Standing Orders, the Modernisation Committee, and such other select committees as the House directs.

Appendix: Liaison Committee guidance

Virtual Participation by Members in Select Committee Proceedings – Draft Guidelines

General principles

1. Standing Order XX sets out provisions for: committees to conduct their proceedings virtually when access to the estate is limited or prevented entirely (as defined in this document); and for reasonable adjustments to be made to allow individual committee members to participate virtually in formal committee proceedings on the grounds of health and wellbeing, and following the conclusion of assessment processes set out in Liaison Committee guidelines.
2. This document defines the circumstances in which the provisions in SO XX apply and sets out the guidelines for Members and committees seeking to make use of these provisions.
3. Both in person and virtual Member participants (provided they meet the requirements for virtual participation set out below) will count towards a committee's quorum. However, for hybrid meetings, committees should aim to achieve quorum in the room, and there is a presumption that whoever is chairing the meeting will also be present in the room. Committee minutes will record whether attendance was virtual or physical.
4. The Select Committee Team [Standards of Service](#) apply to the facilitation of virtual and hybrid committee meetings. As such committee teams will do their best to accommodate requests for virtual participation so far as is practical. Where it is not possible for teams to meet a request from a Member or committee, the clerk will explain why.

5. In line with the procedure regarding premature publication or disclosure of committee proceedings, any conduct by virtual participants which results in the leaking of information about private committee proceedings may be treated as a contempt. In these cases, the usual process following committee leaks would apply.¹

Virtual meetings in emergency situations

6. In instances where access to the parliamentary estate is restricted or prevented entirely—for example, in instances where the availability of committee rooms is significantly reduced or where Members and staff are wholly unable to access the parliamentary estate—some or all Committees may be allowed to meet virtually on a temporary basis on the instruction of the Chair of the Liaison Committee, or in the absence of the Chair, an appointed deputy.²

7. The Chair, or deputy, may expect to receive advice from the Select Committee Team Senior Leadership Team on when it may be appropriate to trigger this temporary permission, and for how long this permission may need to operate. This advice would usually be provided following the meeting of the House Administration’s Incident Management Team, on which SCT is represented.

8. The permission to meet virtually will be disseminated by the Liaison Committee team and the SCT senior leadership team as appropriate.

a. Notice and prioritisation

9. In emergency circumstances support for virtual meetings may be possible within 24 hours. However, due to practical constraints the number of concurrent meetings which can be supported may be limited.

10. In cases where the available capacity to support proceedings cannot accommodate the number of requested meetings then decisions on prioritisation will be made on the authority of the Chair of the Liaison Committee.

11. Factors that may be considered in giving priority to meetings include:

- Whether sessions are covering matters of exceptional public interest.
- Whether sessions are necessary to fulfil a committee’s specific responsibilities under an Act of Parliament.

1 See [Erskine May 2019, part 6, chapter 38, paragraph 38.56, ‘Premature publication or disclosure of committee proceedings’](#).

2 In instances where no Liaison Committee has yet been appointed the instruction may be given by the Leader of the House.

- Whether sessions have been arranged to inform imminent proceedings in the Chamber.
- The urgency of a session, and whether a significant opportunity would be missed if the session were postponed (for example, because the availability of witnesses is very limited).
- Priority will not normally be given to second and subsequent meetings of a committee which has already met during the week in question.
- Whether a quorum of Members will be able to participate.

Virtual participation as a temporary accommodation

12. When necessary, Members may request to participate virtually in formal committee proceedings as a temporary accommodation on the grounds of health or wellbeing. The process for requesting this accommodation is set out below and requires Members to seek advice and support from the Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service (PHWS) in the first instance.

13. As standard, there is a default expectation of in person participation in formal committee proceedings and as such PHWS, Committee staff, and the relevant Committee Chair will always seek to establish whether there are adjustments which can be made which will make it possible for a Member to participate in person. For example, it may be possible for the Committee to meet in a specific room, to request specific adjustments to be made to the room, or to allow for a support worker to attend meetings. In instances where appropriate adjustments are not possible then the Committee Chair will determine whether virtual participation can be accommodated for specific proceedings,³ on the advice of committee staff and in line with the guidance set out in this document.

a. Process for requesting an accommodation

14. Members may seek support and advice from the [Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service](#) (PHWS)⁴ on matters including but not limited to physical accessibility; support for pre-existing conditions; and adjustments required to support them in their work. As part of this Members may discuss with the PHWS team what adjustments may be required for them to participate in committee proceedings, should they be appointed to a committee.

3 In cases where highly secure material is being considered, it may not be possible to accommodate virtual participation. In these cases, the Clerk will provide advice based on the classification the material being considered and any handling advice which has been provided along with the material.

4 To request advice or make an appointment with the Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing Service please contact them by phone or email.

15. In line with the requirements regarding the proxy voting scheme, should Members judge that they will need to participate in committee proceedings virtually either as a temporary accommodation or in specific circumstances due to a longer-term condition, they should obtain a letter to that effect from a consultant and share it with the PHWS team with the request detailed in the email subject. PHWS will log the request and triage to an appropriate Practitioner who will process the request.⁵ In most cases Members can expect to have a conversation with the Practitioner which will inform tailored adjustments.

16. The PHWS team can assist Members in developing a “Wellbeing Action Plan” or “Workplace Adjustments Passport” which sets out adjustments which they may require as standard during the course of their work in the House, and in specific circumstances should they arise.

17. Wellbeing Action Plans or Workplace Adjustments Passports will be personalised to the needs of individual members and developed in consultation with any relevant healthcare professionals.

18. Members who have followed this process and wish to participate in a meeting virtually should email the Chair and the committee Clerk (via the committee mailbox) by midday on the Thursday prior to the meeting at the latest.⁶ This will allow sufficient time for logistical arrangements to be made to facilitate a hybrid session.

Divisions in hybrid or virtual meetings

19. Divisions in virtual or hybrid meetings will take place in the same way as votes in an in-person meeting.⁷

20. As with a physical meeting, if a Member is not in attendance when the question is put then they will not be eligible to vote even if they re-join the meeting during the vote. If due to a technical fault a Member is disconnected from the meeting while a division is taking place then the meeting will be temporarily suspended to allow time for the Member to re-join.

5 PHWS requires a minimum of 72 hours to respond to requests.

6 When contacting the Chair and the Committee team, Members should make it clear that they have followed the adjustments process set out in this document. When possible, Members are encouraged to notify the relevant Chair and Committee team that they are seeking adjustments at the beginning of this process, so that Committee staff can be ready to provide any necessary support and information promptly.

7 For a summary of the procedure for divisions taking place in a committee meeting see [Erskine May, Part 6, Chapter 38, paragraph 38.23](#)

Conduct and security requirements for virtual participation

21. Members participating virtually must do so from a secure location with a hard-wired fast internet connection.

22. Members must take care to ensure they cannot be overheard and will not be interrupted. When participating virtually in private meetings Members must ensure they are the only person present in the room. Members will not be admitted into proceedings from a vehicle.

23. Members must keep their cameras on for the duration of the meeting and use headphones and a microphone. As in Westminster, Members should not eat or drink during the session (except water). Members should ensure that they are appearing in front of appropriate backdrops (i.e. not visible large brand names or slogans, and no virtual or blurred backgrounds). Members may also wish to consider what personal items they have on display.

24. Where a virtual meeting will include a public session, Members must join the meeting link 15 minutes early so that tests can be undertaken to ensure the quality of the broadcast and to resolve any technical issues.

25. In line with current cybersecurity advice and guidance, virtual participation in formal select committee meetings, of parts thereof, that are in private must be conducted via the MS Teams platform (with Members connecting remotely transferring to the broadcast-friendly Zoom platform when/if the meeting goes public).

Operation and review of the guidelines

26. The Liaison Committee owns these guidelines and as such the Liaison Committee Chair, advised by the Liaison Committee Clerk, will be the final decision-maker in any disagreements regarding the application of these guidelines.

27. The Liaison Committee will review the guidelines within 18 months of their introduction, taking into account data on the extent of use of virtual participation as well as committees' experiences.

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 21 April 2026

Members present:

Sir Alan Campbell

Wendy Chamberlain

Daniel Francis

Paulette Hamilton

Rachel Hopkins

Leigh Ingham

John Lamont

Jesse Norman

Virtual participation by Members in select committee meetings

Draft Report (*Virtual participation by Members in select committee meetings*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 18 read and agreed to.

Annex agreed to.

A Paper was appended to the Report as an Appendix.

Resolved, That the Report be the Second Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned until Tuesday 19 May 2026 at 11.30am.

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2024–26

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Access to the House of Commons and its Procedures	HC 755
1st Special	Access to the House of Commons and its procedures: House Administration Response	HC 1726