

EXPLANATORY NOTE FOR THE MOTION ON PROCEEDINGS DURING THE PANDEMIC

This note provides an explanation of the provisions of the motion relating to proceedings during the pandemic. The motion updates the House's procedures relating to divisions and attendance in the Chamber to ensure compliance with social distancing restrictions. These temporary changes to standing orders will be in force until 7 July 2020.

The opening line of the motion rescinds the resolution of 21 April (Proceedings during the pandemic) which provided an overarching framework for the temporary Standing Orders relating to hybrid proceedings. Those Standing Orders have now lapsed.

Paragraph (1) sets out the framework for the new procedure for divisions. Division arrangements will be set out by the Speaker and will adhere to Public Health England guidance.

Paragraph (2) disapplies the procedure for a division unnecessarily claimed, which would be incompatible with the social distancing requirements in the Chamber.

Paragraph (3) amends the procedure for deferred divisions. The same provisos that apply to the new division procedure (physical participation that complies with social distancing) will also apply to any arrangements made by the Speaker for deferred divisions. Deferred divisions will continue to be held at 11.30am on Wednesdays, as needed, for a minimum of two and a half hours but the Speaker will be able to make arrangements for this to be held over a greater period of time if needed to ensure they are managed in line with Public Health England advice.

Paragraph (4) ensures that the Speaker or chair may limit the number of Members present in the Chamber at any given time. It also disapplies the Standing Orders relating to the "prayer card" system which will be discontinued as it is not appropriate due to the requirements of social distancing and to manage the flow of Members in and out of the Chamber. Prayers themselves will still take place at the start of each sitting day.

Paragraph (5) disapplies Standing Orders NOs. 83J to 83X (Certification according to territorial application etc) as the new division arrangements are unlikely to be compatible with recording Double Majority votes.

Background: Resolution of 21 April

That this House is committed to taking all steps necessary to balance its responsibilities for continuing scrutiny of the executive, legislating and representation of the interests of constituents with adherence to the guidance issued by Public Health England and the restrictions placed upon all citizens of the United Kingdom, and is further committed, in pursuit of that aim, to allowing virtual participation in the House's proceedings, to extending the digital capacity of those proceedings to ensure the participation of all Members, and to ensuring that its rules and procedures are adapted to permit as far as possible parity of treatment between Members participating virtually and Members participating in person.