

PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU

TEMPORARY STANDING ORDERS

Introduction

1. The Bureau will recall that access to the public gallery is currently suspended under Temporary Standing Order Rule 3. This paper updates the Bureau on recent SPCB consideration of public access and set out issues for the Bureau's consideration.

SPCB consideration

2. The SPCB considered options for public access at its meeting on Thursday 3 February. At that meeting, the SPCB agreed that, from, 21 February to Easter recess, there should be a phased return to public access to the Chamber gallery. The SPCB also noted that access to committee public galleries for committees would not be achievable while there is still a requirement to observe physical distancing which impacts on overall capacity within committee rooms.
3. As part of their discussions, the SPCB also noted that returning to public access would mean that seating would no longer be available in the Chamber public gallery for Members and that there would need to be ongoing procedural provision by way of a Temporary Standing Order.

Issues for Bureau consideration

4. Removing the seats in the public gallery would leave the number of seats in the Chamber available for use by Members at 95. A proportional allocation of those seats to each party is suggested as follows:

	No. Seats (Total)	% Seats (Total)	No. Seats (95)	% Seats (95)
SNP	64	50	48	50.5
CON	31	24.2	23	24.2
LAB	22	17.2	16	16.8
GRN	7	5.5	5	5.3
LD	4	3.1	3	3.2

5. An updated seating plan to reflect the above numbers will be provided at the Bureau meeting for consideration.
6. In terms of procedural provision, it is suggested that the current Temporary Standing Order Rule 3 be amended to provide that, until Easter recess, public access to the Chamber and committees will not be possible except to the extent that may be determined by the Presiding Officer, with notification of any such determination being published in the Business Bulletin. This approach would allow the maximum flexibility in relation to public access, subject to public health circumstances and any relevant legislation or guidance. If the Bureau is content, it is suggested that the relevant motion be lodged and taken on Wednesday.

Committee substitutes

7. The Bureau will also recall that flexibility for committee substitutes was reinstated prior to Christmas up until 11 February. This flexibility allowed any member to act as a substitute for a member of the same party and recognised that it was possible there would be some instances where Members would not be able to fulfil their committee roles at short notice.
8. Should the Bureau wish to retain this flexibility, this would require the suspension and variation of Standing Orders up to a certain date to be agreed by the Chamber this week. If the Bureau is content for this flexibility to expire, no further action is needed.

Recommendation

9. The Bureau is invited to consider the above and agree—
 - to the suggested allocation of seating as set out in the table at paragraph 4
 - to recommend to the Parliament an amendment to Temporary Standing Order Rule 3
 - whether to extend the flexibility in relation to committee substitutes.

Parliamentary Business Team
February 2022