



Cabinet Office

# Guide to Parliamentary Work

Summer 2018

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# Introduction

The guidance has been produced by the Office of the Leader of the House of Commons, working closely with colleagues across Government and in the service of the House of Commons and House of Lords.

The guidance is for Civil Servants who work closely with Parliament, and in particular parliamentary teams across Whitehall. It is meant to help them in their task of providing accurate advice to Ministers and the Civil Service in its dealings with Parliament. The Guide to Parliamentary Work is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to Parliamentary practice and procedure.

The Guide to Parliamentary Work is a live document and will be updated periodically. If departmental parliamentary teams have any suggestions or comments to make on the guidance, please send them to [commonsleader@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:commonsleader@cabinetoffice.gov.uk).

# 1. Parliamentary Calendar

## SUMMARY

This chapter explains when Parliament sits.

1. Parliamentary Calendar
2. What happens during a general election or referendum

## NARRATIVE

1. The time between one general election and the next is known as a Parliament. The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 provides for five-year, fixed term Parliaments (and set the date for the first general election after that Act was passed as 7 May 2015). However, the Act also sets out two ways in which an election can be triggered before the end of the five-year term. The first of these is if a motion of no confidence in the Government is passed in the House of Commons, and a motion of confidence in the incumbent or an alternative Government is not then passed in that House within two weeks. The second is if a motion for an early general election is agreed by the House of Commons, either by at least two-thirds of that House or without division. (A motion for an early general election was agreed on 19 April 2017, allowing the general election in June 2017 to take place.)
2. Parliaments are separated by a period known as dissolution. Each Parliament is broken down into parliamentary sessions – usually expressed as the ‘YYYY-YY session’ – each beginning with the State Opening of Parliament (which includes the Queen’s Speech) and ending at prorogation, both usually in the spring. The usual duration for sessions of Parliament is one year. The first sessions of the 2010 and 2017 Parliaments were of an extended length.

### Annual calendar

3. In the House of Commons, the calendar is set by the Government, although the individual recess periods are decided by the House on motions tabled by the Government. The 13 Fridays that the House of Commons sits each session to consider Private Members Bills (PMBs) are also proposed by the Government and again agreed by the House, through the tabling of a motion.
4. The calendar setting out the sitting days of the House of Commons in each parliamentary session is announced and issued by the Leader of the House of Commons as far in advance as is practicable. This helps Parliament and the Government with their long term planning but is always issued on the understanding that dates are subject to the progress of the scheduled parliamentary business.

5. The House of Lords tends to sit along similar lines to the House of Commons, with some small variations in the dates and subject to change by the 'usual channels' (informal contact between Whips and Business Managers from the political parties) in the Lords. This is announced by the Leader of the House of Lords or the Lords Chief Whip.

## Recesses

6. Periods when both Houses are not sitting are commonly known as recesses, although all of them, except prorogation, are more correctly termed as adjournments.
7. Each parliamentary session opens with the State Opening of Parliament, usually in spring, and closes at prorogation, usually the following spring. The usual calendar for the periods during which both Houses do not sit is as follows:

<b>Parliamentary Recesses</b>	
May Recess	Early May Bank Holiday
Whitsun Recess	Usually one week in May
Summer Recess	Mid-late July to early September
Conference Recess	Mid-September to early October
November recess	Usually a short recess of less than a week.
Christmas recess	Mid-late December to early January
February recess	February, usually one week
Easter Recess	Usually two weeks to include Good Friday and Easter Monday

8. In general, parliamentary business is not conducted during recess periods, although there are a few exceptions such as the nominated days during the summer recess when it is possible to table written questions in the Lords. Each year, the Table Offices issue guidance to Government on the way in which they work during recess periods.

## Prorogation

9. Prorogation is the formal end of each session. Prorogation is a prerogative act of the Crown, exercised on the advice of the Prime Minister. The date is chosen by the Business Managers (the Leader of the House and Chief Whip in both Houses) shortly before the session ends. This allows flexibility in planning the legislative programme. During the period of prorogation neither the House nor any Committee may meet. It is possible to lay certain documents before Parliament during prorogation (e.g. Secondary Legislation and Command Papers), but not during a dissolution (i.e. not in the run up to a general election). It is also important for Parliamentary Clerks, as it marks the period when parliamentary business is suspended and Parliamentary Questions (PQs) / Questions for Written Answers (QWAs), Early Day Motions (EDMs) and Private Members Bills (PMBs) fall. Government bills also fall if they have not received Royal Assent, unless they are subject to a carry-over motion.

## Recalls of Parliament

10. The procedure for a recall of Parliament is set out in Commons Standing Order No. 13 and Lords Standing Order 17. The Speaker makes the final decision on whether Parliament should be recalled, following representations from ministers that the public interest requires it. This request is coordinated by No. 10 although the request is on behalf of the Government as a whole. Standing Orders also provide for similar arrangements to operate in the House of Lords through the Lord Speaker.

## GENERAL ELECTIONS

### Maximum term

11. Since the passage of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, when a Government is elected it is for a fixed term of five years. The Act specifies that each general election will take place on the first Thursday in May in the fifth calendar year following the last election (or, if the last general election took place earlier in the calendar year than the first Thursday in May, the fourth calendar year following that election). This is subject to the provision made in the Act for the triggering of an early general election (described above).

### Dissolution procedure

12. Under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, the dissolution of Parliament takes place 25 days before the date of the scheduled general election.

### Period of election

13. Special rules apply in a period of election which cover such issues as the making of Government announcements, dealing with enquiries, political activities of civil servants, use of Government property etc. Guidance is issued to departments by the Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service and this is available to all staff.

### MPs and ministers

14. When Parliament is dissolved, MPs cease to be MPs and departments treat all prospective parliamentary candidates on an equal footing. Former MPs are no longer able to use the facilities of the House of Commons. Ministers continue to hold office throughout the election period, and resign with the Prime Minister if the Prime Minister resigns as a result of the election outcome. As Peers are appointed, rather than elected, members of the House of Lords retain their positions. While Peers can continue to access Parliament during a dissolution period, only limited facilities and services are available to them.

## Outstanding business

15. In the lead up to the dissolution of Parliament, steps are taken to clear all outstanding Government parliamentary business:

- **Bills** – Discussions are held with the Business Managers in Parliament about the action required to get outstanding bills through their remaining stages and to Royal Assent ahead of dissolution. The Government usually needs the agreement of the Opposition to get bills through in a much reduced timescale, and so concessions may need to be made (e.g. a controversial clause in a bill may be removed).
- **Statutory Instruments (SI)** – Where affirmative instruments have been laid in draft but not debated, action is taken to seek to get them debated and approved before the dissolution of Parliament. Where negative instruments have been laid and made before the dissolution, the coming into force date is not affected by the dissolution but the time during which Parliament is dissolved is excluded from the 40-day praying period. Parliamentary teams should make careful reference to the Statutory Instruments Practice guidance, produced by the National Archives, in order to prepare handling plans for any SIs being taken forward ahead of dissolution.
- **Parliamentary Questions (PQs)/ Questions for Written Answer (QWAs)** – departments should make every effort to provide substantive answers to PQs and QWAs ahead of the dissolution.

## Outcome of the general election

16. [‘The Cabinet Manual’](#) chapter on elections and Government formation contains information relating to the formation of the Government after a general election.

## The new Parliament

17. The date when the new Parliament is first to meet will have been announced when the previous Parliament was dissolved. The first business of the new Parliament is the election of the Speaker. This is followed by the swearing in of members of both Houses. This process takes several days and is followed by the State Opening of Parliament by The Queen.

## 2. The Parliamentary Day in the Commons

### SUMMARY

The chapter explains the order of business on any given day.

1. Order of business in the House of Commons
2. Components of Parliamentary business

### SITTING TIMES

18. The rules relating to sittings of the House of Commons are set out in Standing Orders Nos 9-13. The current timings of the parliamentary week are shown below:

	<b>Mon</b>	<b>Tues</b>	<b>Wed</b>	<b>Thurs</b>	<b>Fri</b>
Deadline for UQ/ S.O. 24 debate applications	11:30	10:00	10:00	08:15	08:30
Speaker's Conference – Deadline for UQ briefing	12:00	10:30	10:30	08:45	09:00
House Sits	14:30 Prayers, Oral Questions	11:30 Prayers, Oral Questions	11:30 Prayers, Oral Questions (PMQs at 12:00)	9:30 Prayers, Oral Questions	09:30 Prayers, Main Business (PMBs)
Urgent Questions, Oral Statements, Presentation of Bills	15:30	12.30	12:30	10:30 (Business Question at 10:30)	11:00 (Business interrupted for UQs or Statements)



	<b>Mon</b>	<b>Tues</b>	<b>Wed</b>	<b>Thurs</b>	<b>Fri</b>
Moment of Interruption (30 minute Daily Adjournment Debate)	22:00	19:00	19:00	17:00	14:30
House rises	22:30	19:30	19:30	17:30	15:00
Westminster Hall	16:30 – 19:30 (for e-petitions)	09:30-11:30 0 14:30-17:30 0	09:30-11:30 0 14:30-17:30 0	13:30-16:30 0	

19. Public bill, delegated legislation and European committees can be scheduled throughout the week as follows:

Public Bill Committees

Mondays - 4.30pm and 7pm

Tuesdays - 9.25am-11.25am and 2pm onwards

Thursdays - 11.30am-1pm-ish and 2pm onwards

Delegated Legislation Committees

Mondays - 4.30pm or 6pm

Tuesdays and Wednesdays - 8.55am and 2.30pm

Thursdays - 11.30am

European Committees

Mondays - 4.30pm

Tuesdays - 8.55am and 2.30pm

Wednesdays - 8.55am

Thursdays - 11.30am

20. The times above are the earliest that committees can be scheduled on respective days.

## **NARRATIVE**

21. Each day the Speaker holds “Speaker’s conference”, where the Speaker meets with the Deputy Speakers and House officials to consider the day’s business (including statements) and make a decision on any applications for urgent questions (UQs) or whether a Member should be allowed to make an application for an urgent debate under Standing Order No. 24 (SO24).

22. Following the Speaker’s procession to the Chamber, the House sits for Prayers. Prayers are held in private and last for three minutes.

23. At the outset of business is an opportunity during a sitting day for a number of specific procedures to take place, for example:
- Any report (from a whip) of the Queen's answer to an address
  - The Speaker may make formal communications, for example the death of a sitting MP
  - A new writ, the device triggering a by-election, may be moved, normally by the Chief Whip of the relevant party
  - Unopposed private business motions, which are not debatable, may be moved
  - A motion for an unopposed return, may be made, providing full parliamentary privilege protection for the reports from inquiries set up by the Government
24. An hour of the day is then set aside for "question time". There is a rota, and each Government department answers questions once every five sitting weeks. The Prime Minister answers questions every Wednesday at midday.
25. Following question time, any UQs that have been granted take place. They normally last about 30-60 minutes each, though this can be extended or curtailed at the discretion of the Speaker, depending on the level of interest in the Chamber and the level of interest in the rest of the day's business. Parliamentary teams should pay close attention to the number of MPs seeking to speak (known as "bobbing"), which will give an indication of the duration of the particular question. The order in which UQs are answered is determined by the Speaker's office. On every sitting Thursday, under Standing Order No. 21(2), the Leader of the House of Commons announces forthcoming business of the House in response to an Urgent Question, typically from the Shadow Leader of the House of Commons.
26. Oral statements by a Government minister follow any UQs. There may be multiple statements on one day. Further information on oral statements can be found in this guide.
27. Following oral statements, if any Member of the House is newly elected, they are introduced and swear the oath or make the affirmation.
28. At this time the House may also hear an application for an urgent debate under Standing Order No. 24 (SO24). If an application is being heard, the Member who has applied has three minutes to make their case. If the House agrees the application, either unanimously or by forty Members rising in their places in support, or following a division (if fewer than 40 but not fewer than 10 Members rise in support), then the Speaker will set down a time when the issue will be debated and specify the length of debate. Debates can last for up to three hours and generally occur within 24 hours of the application.
29. At this point in the parliamentary day, it is not unusual for Members to raise Points of Order with the Speaker.
30. Then follows, if needed, an opportunity for ceremonial speeches, or for personal statements by either members or ministers. These may be to make apologies or are sometimes used by former ministers to give their reasons for leaving

Government to the House. These are in the gift of the Speaker and are not subject to any questioning or debate.

31. The House then moves onto ‘public business’, which includes presentation of bills by a Member under Standing Order No. 57 or by a minister under Standing Order No. 50 or 57. On a Tuesday or Wednesday, a Member may move a motion for leave to bring in a Bill – the ten-minute rule motion. A ten minute speech opposing the introduction of the bill may also take place, followed, if necessary, by a division (votes).
32. If business is agreed as lasting half a day then this ‘half-way’ point is regarded as arising at about 19:00 on a Monday, 16:00 on a Tuesday and Wednesday and 14:00 on a Thursday, subject to the number of UQs and/or statements.
33. The ‘moment of interruption’, signalling the cut-off or conclusion of the main business, occurs at 22:00 on Monday, 19:00 on Tuesday and Wednesday and 17:00 on Thursday, unless the business is exempted or a programme motion has extended the sitting hours. Some business is automatically exempted (Standing Order No. 15), including Statutory Instruments (SIs) and European Union documents. Following any votes (divisions) at the end of the day, public petitions may be presented.
34. To conclude the day, there is a 30 minute adjournment debate to allow backbenchers to raise matters. This differs to other debates as it is a debate on the technical motion, “That this House do now adjourn”. The motion is unamendable. If the debate starts early it may continue until the moment of interruption and then be renewed for a further 30 minutes. If the Member is not in their place at the start of the debate then the motion will be moved and the House adjourned without debate.

## Useful contacts

Person/office	Purpose
Leader of the House of Commons	Arrangement of business
Government Chief Whip of the House of Commons	Arrangement of business
Speaker of the House of Commons	Chairs business. Responsibilities include decisions on UQs, SO24
Table Office	PQs and EDMs. Order and business papers

## Further information

- <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/business-papers/commons/>
- <http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/business/>

## 3. The Parliamentary Day in the Lords

### SUMMARY

The chapter explains the order of business on any given day.

1. Order of business in the Lords
2. Components of Parliamentary business

35. The current timings of the Parliamentary week are shown below.

### SITTING TIMES

36. Advance sitting times can be seen in the [House of Lords Business document](#). The sitting usually begins at:

- 2.30pm on Monday and Tuesdays
- 3pm on Wednesday
- 11am on Thursdays
- 10am on sitting Fridays

37. The main Chamber aims to rise by:

- 10pm on Monday to Wednesday
- 7pm on Thursday
- 3pm on sitting Fridays

38. The normal sitting times of a Grand Committee are:

- Monday, Tuesday 3.30 to 7.30 pm
- Wednesday 3.45 to 7.45 pm
- Thursday 2 to 6 pm

39. On days when a Grand Committee sits to consider five backbench questions for short debate its normal sitting times are:

- Monday, Tuesday 3.30 to 8.30 pm
- Wednesday 3.45 to 8.45 pm
- Thursday 1 to 6 pm

## NARRATIVE

40. Following the Lord Speaker's procession to the Chamber, the House hears Prayers. Prayers are held in private and usually lasts 3 to 5 minutes. On their conclusion, there is a section of time allocated for preliminary business. This usually takes less than 10 minutes but can take much longer, although this is rare. This can include any of the following procedures, although many of these do not take place frequently: ceremony of introduction and oaths of allegiance of new Peers (this can also take place at the end of business); Lord Speaker's Leave of Absence; messages and answers from the Crown; Royal Assent (or at any convenient time during sitting); addresses of congratulation or sympathy to the Crown; tributes; formal statements from the Lord Speaker and any personal statements from members.
41. The main business then starts with a short question time for half an hour, including four oral questions. The subject matter of these questions is not restricted. The fourth question on each Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday is a "Topical Question" chosen by ballot two working days before it is taken.
42. Private Notice Questions (PNQs) are urgent oral questions. The Lord Speaker decides on their admissibility and, if accepted, they are taken immediately after oral questions. Any business statements follow.
43. Ministerial statements, in theory, come next. Most statements are made in the Commons first and then repeated in the Lords as soon after as is convenient. On Mondays this is usually at a convenient moment after 4.30pm, on Tuesdays a convenient moment after 3.00pm, on Wednesdays it is shortly after 3.30pm and Thursdays the timing is variable but usually around lunch time. The Government Whips' Office will confirm with the relevant department's parliamentary branch whether a Commons statement or an Urgent Question is to be repeated, and at what time in the day. Apart from statements by departments where the Secretary of State is a member of the House of Lords, the repeated statement cannot start until the Commons minister has begun the statement.
44. The substantive business then begins. Discussion of private legislation comes first, followed by "Business of the House" motions which signify a change in the order of business. When required, the Senior Deputy Speaker's business follows; this usually involves discussion of any reports of the House Committee. Discussion of public bills, delegated legislation and reports from select committees comes next, followed by other motions. The order of proceedings can be varied by a "Business of the House" motion, which is usually moved by the Leader.
45. Questions for Short Debate (QSDs) are any questions for debate that have been tabled for oral answer by the Government, and are taken either during the dinner or lunch break, or at the end of business. These are time-limited to one hour (during dinner/lunch break) and one and a half hours (if they occur at the end of business).

## Useful contacts

Person/office	Purpose
Leader of the House of Lords	Arrangement of business
Government Chief Whip of the House of Lords	Arrangement of business
Lord Speaker, House of Lords	Chairs business. Responsibilities include decisions on PNQs
Table Office	QWAs, QSDs, oral questions and motions for debate. Order and business papers

### Further information

- <http://lordsbusiness.parliament.uk/>
- <http://www.lordswhips.org.uk/>

## 4. Parliamentary Papers

### SUMMARY

The chapter explains the different types of Parliamentary papers and is intended to give an introduction to:

1. What the key papers are
2. Why they are significant
3. How they should be handled

### NARRATIVE

46. The term parliamentary papers includes:

- The working papers of Parliament;
- Other papers produced by Parliament and its committees;
- Papers presented to Parliament by outside bodies.

### FIVE MAIN CLASSES OF PAPERS

47. For the purposes of this section, there are five main classes of parliamentary papers:

- House of Commons bills
- House of Lords bills
- House of Commons papers
- House of Lords papers
- Command Papers

48. Papers produced by Parliament include:

- the working papers of Parliament:
  - a. House of Commons bills\*
  - b. House of Lords bills\*
- c. Hansard
- Papers produced by Parliament and its Committees:
  - d. Votes and Proceedings (Commons) and the Minute (Lords) – the formal record of the decisions taken by each House
  - e. House of Commons Papers\*

- f. Standing Orders of the House of Commons and the House of Lords are the rules under which Business is conducted
  - g. Register of Members' Financial Interests
  - h. House of Lords papers\*
- Papers Presented to Parliament:
    - i. Command papers\* – Government papers laid before Parliament; and
    - j. Deposited papers.

(\* Main classes of parliamentary papers)

## House of Commons Order Papers

49. The “Vote Bundle” comprises two basic parts, which are further subdivided. The white pages deal with past and current business and the blue pages deal with future business and signify that the business is ‘provisional’. On Wednesdays, where a deferred division is due to take place under Standing Order No. 41A, a pink ballot paper is also included in the bundle. It is essential that the papers are scrutinised carefully every morning so that all items of relevant parliamentary business are identified and actioned as appropriate. Ministers should be informed of relevant changes.

50. The white pages published on a sitting day include:

- Summary Agenda\*
- Order of Business (including Future Business)\*
- Votes and Proceedings\*
- Papers available today
- Committee papers (amendment lists, Order Papers for the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Grand Committees; proceedings of yesterday’s public bill committee meetings)

51. Also available are:

- ‘The Questions Book’ which is no longer printed and is published on the Parliament website\*
- Order of Business in Westminster Hall.

(\* these items are available on the [Parliament website](#) and the Order Paper App)

52. The blue pages include:

- Notices of questions given on the previous day
- Private business
- Notices of motions for which no date is fixed (i.e. Early Day Motions)
- Notices of new Amendments tabled for future days.

## Summary Agenda

53. This summarises the House’s main business for the day.



## Order of Business

54. The Order of Business is the House's agenda. Urgent questions or oral ministerial statements that are made with no prior notification will instead appear on the annunciators. The main categories of business in the Chamber are:

- **Private Business after Prayers** - Proceedings on private bills, often initiated by local authorities or private companies. For business to proceed at this stage it must be unopposed. If objected to, the Chairman of Ways and Means nominates time for the proceeding to be debated and it will appear on the Order Paper as "Opposed Private Business" when it is scheduled to take place
- **Questions** - These appear every day except Friday, based on the five week departmental rota produced by the House. Questions appear in the order in which they first appeared in the 'blues' following the questions shuffle procedure. There is also a separate list of those Members who have been successful in the ballot to ask the department a "Topical Question"
- **Urgent Questions, Business Question to the Leader of the House (if a Thursday) and notice of ministerial statements** - This may include a provisional title of ministerial statements where prior notice has been given by the Leader of the House of Commons
- **Preliminary Business** – This may include presentation of Government bills or Private Members' Bills (PMB), and Ten-Minute Rule Motions
- **Main Business** – This contains the orders of the day and notices of motions, the main items of business for that days sitting are listed and may include Government bills, Government motions, Opposition day debates, business motions and, on Fridays, Private Members' Bills. The names of the Members sponsoring a motion appear beneath the title. Any time limits or other rules for the business being considered, as previously agreed by the House, are noted below the title of the business (however the Speaker may impose time limits on the day of debate without prior notification on the Order Paper). At the end of business are any petitions due to be presented to the House and the name of the Member selected to raise the topic of the adjournment debate.

55. The Order Paper then includes information on the following:

- **Westminster Hall** - information about the day's business in Westminster Hall
- **Written Statements (also known as a Written Ministerial Statement or WMS) to be made today** – a list of WMSs being issued that day, with the names of the issuing departments and the subject as notified to the Table Office by the specific department
- **Committees** – listing all the committee meetings taking place that day, including the timing and venue, the business being considered, whether the meeting is public or private and the names of any witnesses
- **Publication of select committee reports** – listing all select committee reports being published that day. It includes the name of the committee and the report, together with the publication time and House of Commons paper number
- **Announcements** – information on any upcoming deadlines for tabling business
- **Future Business** – this is comprised of two sections:

Calendar of business for future days and will also include which department is answering oral questions, ten-minute rule motions and the subjects of adjournment debates. It includes information on timings and an indication of the “Member in charge”. Section A will set out the subject of the debate and in some cases set out the motion that will be debated

Remaining orders and notices lists the business not yet scheduled for a specific date, including Government bills awaiting second reading or report stage, motions to approve Statutory Instruments subject to the affirmative resolution procedure and other Government motions

- **European Union Documents** - to be considered in European Committees and provisional dates are published as a separate paper.

## Votes and Proceedings

56. Also known simply as “the Vote”, these are the minutes of the previous day’s business but, unlike normal minutes, they record only the outcomes. The record is compiled by the Journal Office from the entries in the minute books of the Clerk at the Table and accumulated annually into the published journal of the House of Commons.

57. The Votes and Proceedings consists of four main parts:

- The record of proceedings in the Chamber itself, in the order in which they happened. The main body of the Vote also records proceedings which do not require anything to happen on the floor of the House, such as the receipt of a message from the House of Lords
- Reports from general committees which have completed consideration of a bill, statutory instrument or EU document at that day’s sitting, followed by a list of Members and Chairs appointed to general committees that day (usually for meetings on a future date)
- Reports of that day’s select committee meetings, which include a note of any reports agreed to and evidence taken that day (though these may not be published for some time after they are reported to the House)
- An appendix lists all the papers which were laid before the House, such as statutory instruments, Command Papers and annual reports and accounts

## Committees

58. Any further papers will consist of amendment lists for consideration during committee stage of a bill, details of the proceedings in any of the Public Bill Committees meeting the previous day and order papers for the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Grand Committees. The paper detailing proceedings set out the full text of any amendment being considered and the fate of that amendment.

## Blue pages – notices of questions

59. The first section of ‘the blues’ contains notice of questions tabled the previous day, arranged by date for answer, and within each day in alphabetical order by

department. At the end of each question is listed its' Unique Identifying Number (UIN). The section includes those questions previously appearing but transferred for answer to another department. Questions marked with 'N' are named-day questions for answer on a specific day. It is also the first notice of questions tabled for oral answer, these being denoted by an asterisk. It is important to remember that corrections to questions may be made and the wording should be checked later to ensure the Member tabling the question has not amended it. Any question withdrawn by a Member is marked [withdrawn] and if a Member wishes to change an oral question to a written question it is marked [unstarred].

### **Private business**

60. A list of all private bills to be taken in the House or in committee, and notices of motions regarding future private business which are to appear on the Order Paper on future days.

### **Notices of motions**

61. Early Day Motions (EDMs): EDMs are listed in sequential order from the start of each session (with all EDMs falling at prorogation). These motions for debate at an unspecified time in the near future are mainly tabled by backbench Members to raise awareness. However, this is also the method used for motions of no confidence in the Government, and for 'prayers' against statutory instruments subject to the negative procedure in order to seek a debate. In practice, EDMs are rarely debated. EDMs are no longer printed and stand, unless withdrawn, until the end of the session. The [EDM Database](#) provides a list of all EDMs and those Members who have signed up to each.

### **Notices of Amendments**

62. Notices of new Amendments tabled for Public Bill Committees (and committee of the whole House) on future days are listed on the blue sheets.

### **House of Commons papers (HC)**

63. House of Commons papers are one of the five main classes of parliamentary papers, and result from the work of the House and its Committees. Each paper in the series is identified by the prefix HC and the session in which it is published. The Journal Office of the House of Commons allocates the numbers. Documents are referred to by number and session e.g. HC368 2003-04 (Select Committee on Modernisation report on 'Connecting Parliament with the public')

64. The main papers included in this series are: select committee papers; minutes of proceedings of public bill committees; returns to addresses by the House; Estimates and Appropriation etc. Accounts; certain annual and other reports required by statute to be laid before the House and "House Returns".

## Sessional Returns (House Returns)

65. The Sessional Return summarises the business conducted by the House and its committees. This includes: closure of debate, proposal of question and allocation of time; sittings of the House; private bills and private business; public bills; delegated legislation and regulatory reform orders; European legislation; grand committees and the Committee on Regional Affairs; Chairman's Panel and select committees.
66. The Public Bill Office of the House of Commons maintains a public bill index from 1922 to the present day. Public and private bills and delegated legislation are also listed by session in the Part II Index to the relevant House of Commons Journal. Substantial or other procedural information can also be derived from this Index, for example the date of each stage in the passage of a particular Bill through the House of Commons, and instances of closure in the House and in Committees of the whole House.

## Standing Orders (and Parliamentary Procedure)

67. Parliamentary procedure regulates the proceedings of the House and can be divided up into four main sections:
- Practice is the general understanding established over the centuries and does not need to be formally written down
  - The Standing Orders are the rules under which Parliament conducts its business and they regulate the way Members behave and debates are organised. Some Standing Orders are temporary and only last until the end of a session or a Parliament
  - In the House of Commons rulings from the Chair relate to decisions on procedure which have been referred to the Speaker for clarification. These rulings are later included in newer editions of the Erskine May's *Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*
  - Other proceedings are controlled by Acts of Parliament which cover such things as Taking the Oath or specific procedural requirements specified in the relevant Act of Parliament.
68. Within the House of Commons the [Standing Orders \(relating to Public Business\)](#) cover the following matters:

Standing Order no.	Matters covered
1 to 4	Election of the Speaker and arrangements for deputies and chairmen of general committees
5 and 6	Swearing in of Members (taking oath or making affirmation)
7 to 13	Seats in the Chamber and sittings of the House and in Westminster Hall

<b>Standing Order no.</b>	<b>Matters covered</b>
14 to 20 and 23 to 27	Arrangement, timing and precedence of public business
21 to 22D	Arrangements for tabling of notice of Parliamentary Questions and of Written Statements
28 to 37 and 42 to 47	Rules of debate and order in the House
38 to 41A	Arrangements relating to divisions and deferred divisions
48 to 56	Arrangements for the consideration of business relating to the raising and expenditure of public money.
57 to 83 X	Consideration of public bills (including programme motions)
84 to 120	Rules relating to general committees, including, public bill, delegated legislation and European committees and terms of reference for the Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh Grand Committees and the Regional Affairs Committee
121 to 138	Arrangements relating to the work of select committees
139 -149A, 151 and 152A-152 D	Terms of reference of certain select committees and the House of Commons Members Estimate Committee (MEC)
150	Remit of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards
152	Terms of reference of the select committees related to Government departments
152E-152F	Membership of Intelligence and Security Committee
152G	Committee on Members' Expenses
152H	National Policy Statements
152I	National Security Strategy (Joint Committee) Terms of Reference

<b>Standing Order no.</b>	<b>Matters covered</b>
152J	Terms of Reference of the Backbench Business Committee
153 to 157	Public Petitions
158 to 160	Receipt of parliamentary papers, including Statutory Instruments (SIs)
161 to 163	Arrangements in relation to the attendance of members of the public

## Register of Members' Financial Interests

69. The Register of Members' Financial Interests is published shortly after the beginning of a new Parliament, and annually thereafter.

70. Since 1974, the Register has contained payments, financial relationships, paid employment, gifts or benefits in kind, to provide information of any pecuniary interest which a Member receives which might reasonably be thought by others to influence his or her actions as a Member of Parliament.

71. Members are required to notify the House of any relevant interest they have (known as "declaration") when debating and also in written proceedings in the House. Where a Member declares an interest in these situations, their name is followed by the letter 'R' in square brackets. The thresholds set for registration are normally linked to one percent of salary or to a statutory limit.

72. The Registrar of Members' Financial Interests is responsible for maintaining the register and advising Members on the rules. The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards is responsible for investigating complaints that a Member has breached these rules. The Commissioner reports findings to the Committee on Standards, which may then report to the House, and, if necessary, the House may decide on any penalties.

73. Ministers must also comply with the Ministerial Code and any reporting regime managed by the Cabinet Secretary, as well as with the rules of the House in their capacity as MPs.

## House of Lords arrangements

### House of Lords papers

74. A system similar to that operating in the House of Commons exists so that documents, such as select committee reports, the Roll of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and the House of Lords Annual Report and Accounts can be published. To do this the authority of the House is needed which is given by means of a silent

minute entry – the document being published ‘by order of the House’. Similar to the House of Commons, papers are given a prefix (in this case ‘HL Paper’) and are numbered beginning at one from the start of each session.

## House of Lords

75. Together with House of Lords Hansard, there are two additional core documents providing information about the business in the Lords: the white order paper (the agenda for that day) and the green ‘House of Lords Business’.

## House of Lords Business

76. House of Lords Business is printed after each day’s business and includes future business, and the Minutes of Proceedings. It also includes:

- Business of which notice has been given but for which no day has been named. This is grouped into five main headings, motions for balloted debate; select committee reports for debate; other motions for debate; motions relating to Statutory Instruments and Questions for short debate.
- List of Questions for Written Answer (QWA) tabled that day, together with a list of questions which remain unanswered after 14 days. These are listed by the date they were tabled and include details of the Peer tabling the question, the reference number, the date it was due for answer and the responsible Government department.
- Committees – a list of outstanding Government responses to select committee reports (if not received within two months of the relevant committee report being published).
- Legislation – a list of bills in progress, measures, affirmative and hybrid instruments, regulatory reform orders, human rights remedial orders, Legislative Consent Motions and special procedure orders in progress, showing the stage reached by each and the next date for consideration where known; and meetings of committees.

77. The Minutes of Proceedings are similar to those of the Commons in that it is the actions and decisions that are listed rather than what is said in any debate. It is set out in the following order:

- Preliminary matters, such as prayers, Peers taking the oath etc.
- Select committee report printing orders
- Private business
- Public business, in the order in which it is taken in the House
- Minutes of proceedings of any grand committees and public bill committees
- Papers laid before the House
- Lists of members voting in any divisions

## Standing Orders

78. In the House of Lords, procedure is developed by the House itself through the Procedure Committee which considers any proposals for changes to procedure, including that set out under Standing Orders. In the House of Lords the Procedure

Committee authorises the revision of the Companion to the Standing Orders of the House of Lords.

79. Within the House of Lords, the [Standing Orders \(relating to Public Business\)](#) cover the following matters:

<b>Standing Order no.</b>	<b>Matters covered</b>
1	Arrangements when Her Majesty is present
2 to 8	Lords and the manner of their introduction
9 to 11	Excepted Hereditary Peers
12	Expulsion or suspension of a Member
13 to 17	The House and its arrangements
18 and 19	Speaker of the House
20 to 25	General observances
26 to 38	Debates
39 to 45	Arrangement of business
46 to 52	Bills
53 to 60	Divisions
61 to 68	Committees
69 to 72	Parliamentary papers
73	Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments
74	Public Petitions
75 and 76	Proceedings at opening and close of a Parliament or session
77 to 81	Committee for Privileges and Conduct and claims of Peerage
82 to 83	Privilege
84	Making or suspending of Standing Orders

## **PAPERS PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT BY OUTSIDE BODIES**

### **Command Papers**

80. A Command Paper is a document published by the Government and laid before Parliament. White papers, green papers, treaties, reports from Royal Commissions and various other publications, including some select committee responses, can all be released as Command Papers, so called because they are presented to Parliament formally 'By Her Majesty's Command'.



81. Guidance on producing a Command Paper is available on the [National Archives website](#). The Journal Office guide to laying papers is also worth reading.

82. Published Command Papers are available on the [National Archives website](#). They can also be published on departmental websites via Gov.uk once they have been laid before Parliament.

## Deposited Papers

83. These are more commonly referred to as Library Deposits. Deposited Papers are those placed in the Library of either or both Houses which are not laid before the House. The Library will not accept papers that have been laid.

84. Guidance on the rules for depositing papers is regularly published by the House of Commons Library. It is available at [www.parliament.uk/depositedpapers](http://www.parliament.uk/depositedpapers) and should be read alongside this guidance.

85. A document must have the commitment of a minister in order for it to be deposited.

- Without this it will be refused by the Library.
- This commitment is usually in the form of a response made in a debate, a written or oral statement, a written or oral PQ answer or a letter from a minister.
- The wording of the commitment must be “placed in the Library” or “deposited in the Library” – it should not use the word “laid”.
- Deposited papers are accepted throughout recesses. Papers to be deposited should be e-mailed to the library with a [completed coversheet](#).
- Once deposited, no item can be withdrawn, although a replacement document can be deposited as well as the original.
- All documents are considered in the public domain once deposited and can be supplied to members of the public in response to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. The list of deposited papers, and the full text of electronically sent papers, can also be found in the [guidance](#) published by the House of Commons Library.

## Useful links

National Archives guidance:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/producing-official-publications/parliamentary-papers-guidance/command-paper-requirements/>

Guide to laying papers: <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/laying-papers.pdf>

## 5. Oral Statements in the Commons

### SUMMARY

The chapter explains oral statements and the process of oral statements in the House of Commons.

### NARRATIVE

86. The [Ministerial Code](#) states that “When Parliament is in session, the most important announcements of Government policy should be made in the first instance, in Parliament.”
87. Ministers can make important announcements to the House by either an oral or written statement.
88. There is no explicit provision in Standing Orders for the procedure for making an oral statement, but it is a regular feature of the parliamentary day. Statements usually cover announcements of major Government policy or set out the Government’s response to topical events.
89. Generally, oral statements are made in the House of Commons first and repeated in the House of Lords.
90. The right to make a statement is treated as a prerogative of ministers, and neither the permission of the Speaker nor the leave of the House is required. However, statements are introduced with the words “with permission” out of courtesy to the Chair. Statements may relate to any area of a minister’s responsibilities. It is down to the Government to decide which minister makes any particular Statement. Within Government, it is the role of the House of Commons Business Managers to manage which statements are made, their timing and, where necessary, the order in which they will be made. Normally, the most senior minister or department takes precedence.
91. The prepared statements must last no longer than 10 minutes (approximately 1,200 words). The Speaker has been clear that this time limit must be adhered to. The time allowed for supplementary questions is a matter for the Chair, but generally up to one hour is allowed, depending on the number of Members who wish to ask supplementary questions and the other business of that day.
92. In order to make a statement, departments should approach the Office of the Leader of the House of Commons in the first instance. The Business Managers

meet regularly so that statements can be considered alongside the business to be announced during the Business Questions led by the Leader of the House on Thursdays. The decision on whether to allow a ministerial statement is taken in consultation with No.10.

### Sharing the statement in advance

93. The Ministerial Code specifies that departments must make advanced copies of statements available to the Opposition spokespersons, via the Government Whips office, at least 45 minutes before the statement is made. A copy must also be provided in advance to the Speaker.
94. It is the responsibility of the relevant department to ensure that copies of statements are made available to the Opposition, Speaker's Office, the Press Gallery and Members.
95. When a statement is delivered to the Speaker's Office, it is important to consider that the Speaker will need to be apprised of those Members who have a specific interest in the issue. If the department has considered which Members are most affected by the statement, this should be notified to the Speaker's Office, as should details of any areas or constituencies affected by, for example, pilot projects.
96. Copies of statements should be made available to Members in the Chamber as soon as the Minister sits down. Copies should therefore be delivered to the Vote Office and Printed Papers Office in the Lords in advance (and sent by email as a PDF), clearly labelled and embargoed for when the Minister sits down. Up to around 200 copies for each House may be required.
97. When producing a PDF copy to be sent to the Vote Office, please ensure you also produce a large size version (i.e. Arial size 24) and email this with your original PDF.
98. Copies of any documents referred to in the statement, such as a White Paper or consultation paper, must be made available to MPs in the Vote Office ahead of the start of the statement (and note that Command Papers must be available in the Vote Office shortly after being laid). Departments should consider carefully whether MPs would benefit from being able to read the accompanying document for a period of time before the statement begins and should factor this into their handling.
99. Copies are also made available to the Press Gallery when the minister sits down. Successive Speakers have deprecated the practice of informing the media about the content of statements before they have been made to the House.

## Notice of oral statements

100. On the morning of the statement, the Private Secretary to the Leader of the House of Commons lets the Speaker's Office know both the title of, and the name of the minister delivering, the statement.
101. The title of the statement may appear on the Order Paper if desired by the department and agreed by No 10 and Business Managers. Notice must be given before the House rises the day before.
102. It is important that the title of statements is not political or in the form of a slogan. It must not be ambiguous or vague. If referring to a document it is normally better to give notice of "Publication of xxxxx" to help avoid this problem. The Table Office will always advise departments on acceptable titles. Notice on the day of the statement is, wherever possible, given to members by means of notices placed in the Members' lobby and displayed on the annunciator.

## Timing of oral statements

103. The timing of a statement will be planned through discussions between the relevant department, No.10 and the Business Managers. It is sometimes necessary, however, to arrange for a statement to be made at short notice. This is usually in response to a specific incident or event.
104. Statements take place at a set time during the parliamentary week. Statements would normally be made at 15.30 on a Monday and 12.30 on a Tuesday and a Wednesday and 11.30 on a Thursday (following the Business Question). Statements on Fridays are less common (please see section below). If any UQs have been allowed, these will take place before statements.
105. Where it is necessary for more than one statement to be made on the same day it is usual for the relevant departments to arrange the order based on the significance of the statement. Should they be unable to agree, the Business Managers, in the absence of other factors, will take a decision, and will usually arrange for the senior ranking minister to appear first. When other statements are planned for Thursdays, the Leader may decide to allow these to take precedence over Business Questions. Business Questions is then taken after other statements and itself becomes a statement (as opposed to an urgent question), although the format is otherwise unaffected.
106. On Fridays, statements are made at 11.00am, when the debate taking place is interrupted to allow for the statement and resumed on its conclusion.

## Oral Statements process

107. Departments should bid for an oral statement using the form provided by the Leader's Office. This should be emailed to the Leader's Office for consideration by the Business Managers.

108. All oral statements also need to be agreed by No. 10.

109. The department needs to confirm with the Leader's Office the final title of the statement and the minister making the statement at the earliest opportunity, and certainly before 9am on the day the statement is to be made. The Leader's Office will advise all Government departments by email once the Speaker's Office has been notified.

110. The statement should be provided to the following stakeholders, in advance, by the department's parliamentary branch:

- Chief Whip
- Speaker
- Leader
- Table Office
- Hansard
- Lords Chief Whip
- Opposition spokespeople (via the Chief Whips' office)

### **Box support**

111. The minister's office should decide which officials are required in the Officials' Box. All officials supporting in the Officials' Box must have their names notified to the Speaker's Office in advance.

### **Vote Office**

112. Ensure the Vote Office has enough copies of any accompanying papers for Members. Copies of statement should be sent by e-mail to No.10, Leader's Office, Whips' Office and Speaker's Office.

### **Statements on Opposition Days/other events**

113. By convention, statements are avoided where possible on Opposition days. It is also generally not appropriate to make planned oral statements at certain times. For example, during the debate which follows the Queen's Speech at the start of each session.

### **Stakeholders**

114. Parliamentary teams should work with the following people/offices ahead of an oral statement:

- No 10
- Leader's Office - Private Secretary (Parliamentary Business) who will liaise with the Business Managers and No 10 to confirm when a statement is agreed and notify the House

## 6. Oral Statements in the Lords

### SUMMARY

The chapter explains oral statements and the process of oral statements in the House of Lords.

115. Oral statements in the Lords can be made with the leave of the House without notice. Usually, the responsible minister is a member of the Commons, in which case the statement is repeated in the Lords. The timing of any repeated statement is agreed through the Usual Channels in the Lords, and the Chief Whip can announce the timing in the Chamber.
116. Any repeat of a Commons statement cannot start until after the statement has begun in the Commons. The formulation for starting any repeated statement is “My Lords, with the leave of the House I will now repeat a statement made in the Other Place earlier today by [xxxxx]”. The text of the statement is then repeated verbatim from the Commons.
117. If the responsible minister is a Member of the House of Lords, the statement will be made in the Lords first (and if necessary, repeated in the Commons). This usually happens immediately after oral questions (Monday to Thursday) or at the start of business on a Friday. Any Lords Statement should begin “My Lords, with the leave of the House I will now make a statement on [xxxx].”
118. After the statement has been made (or repeated) to the House, the two Opposition front benchers (and occasionally the Convenor of the Crossbench Peers) will speak, and then the minister should reply. The Opposition frontbench speeches and the minister’s reply should take no more than 20 minutes in total. Then follows a period of questions and answers for backbench Peers, for up to 20 minutes.
119. Statements made or repeated in the Lords should be made available in the Printed Paper Office and to the Opposition on the same basis as statements made in the Commons. The Government Whips Office can provide guidance on this.

# 7. Written Ministerial Statements in the Commons

## SUMMARY

The chapter explains Written Ministerial Statements (WMS) in the House of Commons and the process for making a statement.

## NARRATIVE

120. Under Standing Order No. 22A a minister may give notice of the intention to make a written statement in the House of Commons.

### Giving Notice of a WMS

121. Notice can be given up to five sitting days in advance of issuing the statement, although the normal practice is to notify the House a day before. It is the convention that notification of written statements is made in the name of the Secretary of State, even though a different minister may be making the statement.

122. Notice is given using the Table Office portal to which all Government departments have access. At the latest, the title must be uploaded before the House rises; the latest this can be done is the day before the statement is to be made while the House is still sitting.

123. The Table Office will acknowledge receipt via an email and through the online system by changing the status of the WMS notification to “Tabled” on the portal.

124. The title of the statement should indicate the subject matter and not be vague or ambiguous. It should also not be a slogan or overtly political. Once notice of a WMS has been given, the title and department will appear in the Order Paper and the department must make a statement on that day.

125. If giving notice earlier than the day before a WMS is to be issued, departments should be aware that the title appears on the Order Paper and in the public domain, and may therefore attract press speculation and inquiries. It may be wise to provide briefing for Prime Minister’s Questions (PMQs) and/or Business Questions (BQs) if the statement title is published before these events.

## Issuing a WMS

126. Written statements should be issued at 9.30am where possible. Every effort should be made to issue written statements as early in the day as possible and normally by 12.30pm. If the statement cannot be issued by 12.30pm, the department should endeavour to notify the Chair of the relevant select committee and/or any other member with an interest. Where it is necessary to delay the issue of a statement the Opposition front bench spokespersons should be informed.
127. On Thursdays, the Leader's Office should be provided with all WMSs to be made that day in preparation for the Leader's Business Questions.
128. Written statements should be uploaded onto the Q&A online system for the Commons and the Lords. Separate guidance is available on the Q&A website.
- The Commons Gatekeeper will check the statement before accepting it and releasing it onto the Parliament website at [www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements](http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements)
  - Once the statement has been accepted by the Commons Gatekeeper it will be made available to members in the Vote Office. At this point, it may therefore be shared more widely – departments do not have to wait for it to appear on the Parliament website
  - Statements are usually published online a short time after the Gatekeeper has accepted them; they are also printed in the next edition of Hansard

## Withdrawing notice of a statement

129. Notice of a written statement may be withdrawn through the Order Paper portal. But once on the Order Paper, it is not possible to choose not to make the statement – a statement of some kind must be made. The department could make a short statement advising that the planned statement will not be made or will be made in due course.

## HOUSE OF LORDS ARRANGEMENTS

130. In the House of Lords, written statements may be made when the house is sitting by Ministers or the Senior Deputy Speaker. Notice is not required. The statement is uploaded to the Q&A website.



## 8. Written Questions

### SUMMARY

The chapter explains processes around Written Parliamentary Questions in the House of Commons (WPQs) and Questions for Written Answer (QWAs) in the Lords.

### NARRATIVE

131. Written questions allow MPs and Peers to ask Government ministers for information on the work, policy and activities of Government departments.
132. In responding to Questions, ministers should follow the principles of the Ministerial Code, making the utmost effort to give accurate and helpful answers and correcting any inadvertent errors quickly.

### Q&A (electronic) system

133. Departments and both Houses manage written questions via Parliament's online Q&A system. There is separate guidance for departments on its operation, including deadlines, transfers and holding responses available on the Q&A website itself.

### Rules and process for PQs in the House of Commons

134. A Member can ask a question on any matter falling within the responsibility of a minister. Questions can be ruled out of order because Government does not have responsibility for that particular issue, such as spending by Local Authorities and Foundation Trusts, court decisions, operational police matters and the actions of EU institutions.
135. Questions may not relate to devolved matters unless they:
  - seek information that the UK Government is empowered to require of the devolved executive
  - relate to matters covered or to be covered by legislation introduced in the UK Parliament
  - concern the operation of a concordat between the UK Government and the devolved executive
  - concern matters in which UK ministers have taken an official interest
  - press for action in areas where UK ministers retain administrative powers

136. MPs can table PQs for answer on any day on which the House of Commons is sitting. Written questions take two forms:
- Questions for ordinary written answer are put down for answer no earlier than two sitting days after they are received and, by convention, the Government aims to answer within a working week of tabling.
  - Questions for answer on a named day – i.e. a date on which the MP wishes to have an answer, the minimum period of notice being three sitting days (including non-sitting Fridays).
137. MPs cannot ask more than five 'Named Day' PQs per day. Whilst there is no limit to the number of ordinary PQs a Member may put down, the House has resolved to limit the number of questions tabled via the e-tabling system to 20 per sitting day per Member.
138. A question is removed from the Question Book only if:
- the Member is appointed to the Government or is elected as Speaker. If a Member is appointed to a Parliamentary Private Secretary post their question will not be automatically removed and they may have to withdraw it themselves.
  - the subject matter of the question becomes subject to the sub-judice rule.
  - a suspension of the member in question is effective on the day which the question is set down for answer.

### **Rules and process for QWAs in the House of Lords**

139. Procedures for dealing with Lords' QWAs follow a broadly similar pattern to those in the Commons, although there are differences in their form, and in the way in which they are answered. Overall fewer questions are tabled in the House of Lords than in the House of Commons. Named day questions are not possible in the House of Lords.
140. Most questions tabled in the Lords are addressed to Her Majesty's Government and not to any particular Minister or department. However, certain questions may be addressed to the holders of specific official positions: those concerning procedure or the conduct of Government business in the House are addressed to the Leader of the House and those concerning the services and administration of the House to the Senior Deputy Speaker.
141. Peers may each table up to six Written Questions on each sitting day, and no more than twelve in a week.
142. The House of Lords Table Office allocates each question to a department for the purposes of producing a response.
143. Every effort should be made to ensure that a response to a QWA appears in Hansard within five working days of the date on which the QWA is tabled, although the formal time-limit for answering questions is ten working days.
144. Answers are sent to members via the online Q&A electronic question and answer system. When the House is in recess, answers should be sent to the

member concerned within 10 working days. They are published online on the day they are answered and in a collated daily report either on the next sitting day or, during the summer recess, on the day following the second tabling day, with a reference to the date of the answer. Where appropriate, written questions may be answered on the day on which they are tabled. Where the answer is very long a copy may be placed in the Library of the House rather than printed in Hansard.

145. It is a requirement for Lords' QWAs that a hard copy of the answer, signed by the Minister, is sent to the asking member. An answer should only be submitted on the electronic Q&A site once the Minister has signed the hard copy.

## Processes in both Houses

### Transfers

146. If a question does not fall within the responsibilities of Ministers in the department to which it has been tabled it should be transferred to the correct department. Parliamentary branches of the relevant departments should agree the transfer between themselves. The Q&A system guidance explains the process through the system.
147. Departments should act promptly in transferring questions. Departments should not refuse to accept a transfer if it rightly lies within their responsibilities, even if the delay in transfer leads to the answer being late. Equally, transfers should be made at the earliest opportunity, ensuring the department accepting the transfer has the opportunity to provide a timely answer.

### “Round robin” questions

148. A question is classified as a “round robin” when it has been tabled to three or more departments in the same or very similar format. These questions will often, although not always, be on corporate issues (e.g. staff absence, expenditure on certain items). Although individual Ministers are ultimately responsible and accountable for their answers, it may be helpful to seek advice from the department with lead responsibility for the topic in question.
149. Cabinet Office takes the lead in identifying which department drafts the round robin guidance for a particular question.
150. Departments should not delay preparing an answer until round robin advice is provided and should not miss the deadlines for answer.
151. Departments will be advised if they should not answer a round robin question until central guidance has been issued. Departments who have been asked to provide ‘round robin’ guidance to other departments should do this within 24 hours.

152. Round robin questions are rarely used in the House of Lords.

### Disproportionate cost

153. There is an advisory cost limit known as the disproportionate cost threshold which is the level above which departments can decide not to answer a written question. The current disproportionate cost threshold is £850 (from 8 February 2012); the limit does not apply to oral questions.

### Referring to previous answer

154. A written question may be answered by referring to a previous answer if it is the same question or if the original answer fully answers the new question. Where it is appropriate to refer back to an earlier answer, the formula used is:

*“I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on (date) to Question UIN [insert UIN and link it to the answer found on the Q&A web pages on <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>].”*

155. In the House of Lords, the wording to refer to a previous answer should be along the lines of:

*“I refer the noble Baroness/Lord to the answer I gave to question (insert UIN) to Baroness/Lord (Insert Peer) on (date)”*

### Referring to websites or other published material

156. Where information already exists on a Government website, departments may wish to give the web address in the answer. However, the information referred to on that website should be easily comprehensible to the ordinary reader. In particular, those asking a question should not be expected to analyse and interpret detailed statistical information to work out the answer to their question. In following best practice, departments should also consider whether a clearer answer is provided by extracting the information from the website and attaching it to the answer. If referring to a website, departments are advised to ensure that any URL connects directly to the information referred to (not a departmental homepage) and is working.

157. The same broadly applies in the House of Lords, although any relevant information from the website should be set out briefly in the answer (e.g. see: <http://www.parliament.uk/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/lords/2017-07-18/HL1017>). Answers ‘should be complete and comprehensible and should not rely on references to external documents or web pages’.

### Holding replies – House of Commons only

158. If it is not possible to answer a named-day written Question in full on the specified date, a holding answer must be given. A holding answer follows a

standard format and is given by the department ticking the checkbox on the Q&A system. Guidance on using the Q&A system is available on the Q&A website. Where a holding answer is given, the standard text of the answer is:

*“The [department] has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available.”*

### **Prorogation answers**

159. In the House of Commons, when questions are tabled in the run-up to prorogation, ministers should strive to answer them substantively before prorogation. However, if this is not possible, ministers should answer the question with the following form of words:

*“It has not proved possible to respond to the [Rt] Hon Member in the time available before Prorogation”.*

160. It would be open to the Member concerned to re-table the question in the new session if they wish.

161. In the House of Lords, the answer should still be prepared and sent to the Peer. The following wording is used in the recorded response:

*“It has not proved possible to respond to this question in the time available before Prorogation. Ministers will correspond directly with the Member”.*

### **Letters from executive agencies and non-departmental public body (NDPBs)**

162. In the House of Commons, it is normal practice for a department receiving a PQ relating entirely to the day-to-day operations of an executive agency or NDPB to provide an answer on behalf of that body.

163. Letters from the Executive Agency or NDPB should either be pasted into the answer box in full, preceded by a suitable introduction; or uploaded as attachments *provided* that a suitable introduction has been pasted into the answer box. The text in the answer box should be as self-contained as possible.

164. In the House of Lords, where Government functions are delegated to an executive agency, accountability to Parliament remains through ministers. When a minister answers a parliamentary question, orally or in writing, by reference to a letter from the chief executive of an agency, the minister remains accountable for the answer, which attracts Parliamentary privilege. Where relevant, a letter may be included in the response or referred to for future deposit in the Library e.g.:

*The Gambling Commission considers a range of criteria when sharing information and is subject to oversight on data protection and use of surveillance powers by the*

*Information Commissioner, the Interception of Communications Commissioner and the Office of Surveillance Commissioners. In view of the complexity of this area I have asked the Gambling Commission's Chief Executive to write to my noble Friend directly on the matter of information sharing. A copy of her letter will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.*

<http://www.parliament.uk/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/lords/2014-09-26/HL1863>

## Relationship to FOI

165. The Freedom of Information Act was introduced in 2000. Cabinet Office guidance to officials gives relevant information on the relationship between Freedom of Information (FOI) and parliamentary questions.
166. There should be no inconsistencies between the provision of information in answers to written questions and information given under the Act.
167. Ministers should be advised of any relevant FOI cases under consideration when answering written questions, and it should be revealed if information being released is of a sort not normally disclosed.
168. If information is not disclosed, or fully disclosed, the draft answer should make this clear and explain the reasons in terms similar to those in the FOI Act (without resorting to explicit reference to the Act itself). For example:

*“The release of information would prejudice commercial interests”*

## Corrections

169. As per the Ministerial Code, if an inadvertent error in an answer is discovered it must be corrected as soon as possible.
170. Corrections should be made in a way that is transparent and open, not only for the Member but also for others, including the general public. This means that it will not normally be appropriate simply to write to the Member concerned and place a copy in the Library.
171. Full guidance on ministerial corrections is available in the Q&A User Guide.
172. **House of Commons:** Corrections to written answers must now be submitted through the Q&A system. There are two types of correction in the House of Commons. The category of correction is decided by the House of Commons Gatekeeper. “Editorial corrections” include, for example, minor typing errors or small changes that do not alter the substance or meaning of the answer in any way. “Ministerial corrections” are necessary when the meaning of an answer has changed, when figures given in the original answer have been found to be

incorrect, or where any other significant addition to an answer or removal of text has taken place. Once a correction has been accepted as a Ministerial Correction by the Gatekeeper, the Q&A system will automatically send the corrected answer to the Member via email. The correction will appear on the web pages about 45-90 minutes later. Editorial corrections are permitted to written statements. Substantial corrections to statements should be made by issuing a new statement.

173. **House of Lords:** Corrections to written answers in the Lords must also be submitted through the Q&A system. All corrections, if accepted by the House of Lords Gatekeeper, will be published on the Q&A web pages. Editorial corrections are not permitted in the House of Lords to written statements. Substantial corrections to statements should be made by issuing a new statement.

## 9. Debates

### SUMMARY

This section gives an overview of the types of debate which take place in the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

### NARRATIVE

174. As well as scrutinising legislation and questioning Ministers, much of the parliamentary timetable is taken up with debates.
175. Debates are an important way for MPs and Peers to hold the Government to account.
176. There are a variety of different types of debate in each House. In all forms, a Minister will set out the Government's position.
177. Debates can be in the form of general debates, on which the House debates an issue on the basis of a 'take note' motion, i.e. "that this House has considered the matter of...."
178. Alternatively, debates can take place on a substantive motion, which sets out a position and the House votes to agree or disagree with it (also known as a 'resolution').
179. Debates are also a part of the legislative process which enables MPs and Peers to debate bills before they are voted on and may become law.
180. Ministers will require briefings and opening and/or closing speeches as necessary in accordance with the length and type of debate. For example, a House of Commons general debate in Government time is opened and closed by Ministers and an opening and closing speech is therefore required. On the other hand, a Minister is only called once in a backbench debate or an emergency debate under SO. 24, so Parliamentary Clerks should liaise with the Speaker's Office as to when the Minister will be called to speak in the debate.
181. When closing a debate, ministers should seek to give as full a response as possible, addressing all of the points raised by MPs or Peers during the debate. Responses will usually need to be weaved into the closing speech.



182. Officials will be expected to support the Minister for the duration of the debate in the Officials Box in the Commons, in the areas reserved for officials in Westminster Hall or the House of Lords (as the case may be).

183. Officials will need to pay close attention to the points being raised and provide lines for the minister if needed. If the point cannot be addressed in the closing final speech, the minister may say that they will write to the Hon. member or the noble Lord. Where there is a commitment to write, a letter will need to be drafted and sent as soon as possible after the debate. The letter should include the phrase “A copy of this letter is being placed in the Library of the House”, in order that it can be made available to other Parliamentarians who took part in the debate.

184. Timing of debates in the Commons Chamber and Westminster Hall (subject to change depending on the particular circumstances of the day’s business):

	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
Commons Chamber (Ministerial statements or Urgent Questions may delay start)	Starting between 3.30 and 5.00pm 7.00pm – end of half day debates	Starting between 12.30 and 2.00pm 4.00pm – end of half day debates	Starting Between 12.30 and 2.00pm 4.00pm – end of half day debates	Starting between 11.15 and 12.45pm 2.00pm – end of half day debates	Starting 09.30 Private Members Bills
Moment of Interruption and Adjournment Debate starts	10.00pm	7.00pm	7:00pm	5.00pm	2.30pm
House rises	10.30pm	7.30pm	7.30pm	5.30pm	3.00pm
Westminster Hall	4.30pm-7.30pm (for debates on e-petitions – not every week, Backbench Business Committee or Select Committee reports )	Debates take place at: 09.30-11.00am 11.00-11.30am 2:30 – 4.00pm 4.00 – 4.30pm 4.30 – 5.30pm	Debates take place at: 09.30-11.00am 11.00-11.30am 2:30 – 4.00pm 4.00 – 4.30pm 4.30 – 5.30pm	1.30pm-4.30 pm Backbench Business Committee debates	

## House of Commons debates

### Debates in Government time

185. The Government will occasionally find time to debate matters in Government time. This may be where a major issue requires debate and decision (such as ahead of a vote to take military action) or where the Government has decided to schedule a debate following representations from members.
186. For these debates, in most cases the relevant Secretary of State would be expected to open the debate and a junior minister would close the debate.
187. The debate may last a full day.

### Queen's Speech debates

188. Following the Queen's Speech to Parliament, each House debates its content.
189. This is known as the Debate on the Address and lasts for about 5 days. Each day, the debate will usually last for a full day, for perhaps 7 hours or more.
190. The subjects for debate are selected in advance. They are usually thematic, for example a day's debate on "foreign affairs" or "justice and home affairs". Each day is therefore likely to require ministerial and briefing inputs from more than one department.
191. Ministers will speak at the beginning and end of each day's debate.
192. There will then be a vote at the end of all debates on the Address.<sup>1</sup>

### Non-Government-sponsored debates

#### Opposition Day Debates

193. All main opposition parties are given an allocated number of parliamentary days to debate subjects of interest to their party. These are usually high profile and likely to generate media attention.
194. There will usually be only a day or two's notice of the topic to be debated, so departments will likely need to prepare briefing quickly, including opening and closing speeches and detailed Q&A.
195. The Opposition will speak first, and the Secretary of State or a junior minister will then respond.

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<sup>1</sup> Votes on the Queen's Speech were traditionally considered votes of confidence in the Government and a Government which lost a vote would have been expected to resign. The Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011 provided a statutory wording for a motion of no confidence and its legal effect.

196. At the end of the debate, the minister will provide the penultimate speech and the Opposition will close the debate.

197. There may be a vote at the end of the debate.

198. In a [written statement](#) to the House of Commons on 26 October 2017, the Leader of the House of Commons explained the action that the Government will take where an opposition motion is approved by the House:

*“Where a motion tabled by an opposition party has been approved by the House, the relevant Minister will respond to the resolution of the House by making a statement no more than 12 weeks after the debate. This is to allow thoughtful consideration of the points that have been raised, facilitate collective discussion across Government, especially on cross-cutting issues, and to outline any actions that have been taken.”*

### **Backbench Business Committee debates**

199. The Backbench Business Committee was established in 2010 and is allocated 35 days each session to schedule debates.

200. The Backbench Business Committee meets weekly to hear representations from MPs wishing to secure a debate.

201. The Committee can consider any subject for debate, including those raised in petitions or national campaigns.

202. Debates take place either in the Commons Chamber, usually on a Thursday afternoon, or in Westminster Hall on Mondays or Thursdays.

203. A minister will speak once in the debate, usually to respond to the debate at a time negotiated with the Committee, but usually will not be required to wind up. A typical ministerial speech will last for 10-15 minutes.

204. Backbench Business Committee debates may be on either a take note or a substantive motion.

### **Pre-Recess Adjournment Debate (PRAD)**

205. Following the establishment in the House of Commons of the Backbench Business Committee in June 2010, the business on the last sitting day before a recess period is now usually subject to a decision of that Committee.

206. In practice the Committee has so far usually chosen to follow the tradition of ‘Pre-recess Adjournment Debates’ at which Members can raise a variety of issues, before a response is provided by the Government.

207. This is either as a full day's debate or a half day's debate.

208. The debate covers matters pertaining to all Government departments. The Commons Leader's Office coordinates the Government's response to the PRAD debates and may ask individual departments for briefing on topics that are likely to arise.

209. There is no vote.

### **End of day adjournment debate**

210. There is a half-hour adjournment debate at the end of each day's sitting in the House of Commons Chamber. This will be on a single topic proposed by one MP.

211. The Speaker chooses the subject for Thursday's debate; for other days, successful MPs are selected by ballot. MPs often use adjournment debates to raise national or international matters, issues of importance to them or their constituencies.

212. The debate may start earlier and last for longer if the preceding business finishes earlier than the moment of interruption. Parliamentary Clerks should therefore pay close attention to the preceding business.

213. A Minister will close the debate with a speech of about 10 minutes.

214. There is no vote.

### **Westminster Hall debates**

215. Debates take place in Westminster Hall on Monday to Thursday. On a Monday afternoon, the Petitions Committee can schedule any e-petitions that have reached 100,000 signatures for debate. Five debates take place each day on Tuesday and Wednesday. There is also a three hour slot for debates from 13.30 on a Thursday afternoon that is sometimes divided between two 90 minute debates.

216. MPs often use Westminster Hall debates to raise national or international matters, or other issues of importance to them or to their constituencies.

217. MPs choose the length of time and bid for either a 30 minute or 90 minute slot.

218. A minister will close the debate with a speech of about 10-15 minutes.

219. The Chamber in Westminster Hall should replicate the propriety of the Commons Chamber. Officials sitting behind should adhere to the behaviours and dress code expected in the Officials Box in the Commons, further details of which are provided in this guidance (para 278 onwards).

220. Notes cannot be passed directly to ministers despite their proximity. A Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) should be on hand to pass notes to the Minister.
221. It is the department's responsibility to provide a PPS or PPS-support.
222. There is no vote.

### **Standing Order No. 24 (SO24) debates**

223. SO24 allows MPs to seek an emergency debate in the House of Commons Chamber if they think there is a "specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration".
224. An MP makes an SO24 application to the Speaker, who decides whether the application may proceed.
225. The MP then has three minutes in which to make the case for an urgent debate.
226. The Speaker then gives the decision, delivered without explanation.
227. If the application is successful and agreed by the House, the Speaker will specify when the debate will take place (often the next day) and for how long (up to three hours) the debate will take place.
228. The debate may be held on the same day if the matter is deemed significantly urgent (see para 18 for details on timings).

## **HOUSE OF LORDS DEBATES ARRANGEMENTS**

### **General**

229. Debates can be scheduled to take place in the House of Lords Chamber or in Grand Committee in the Moses Room. The date and location of debates is clearly set out in advance in the [House of Lords Business document](#) and in [forthcoming business](#). The House cannot hold divisions on business in Grand Committee.
230. A frontbench minister will need to respond to each debate.
231. Parliamentary teams should check the [House of Lords Business document](#) and in [forthcoming business](#) to see the upcoming timetable for debates. However, in general, Mondays to Wednesdays usually comprise debates on legislation whilst other debates are limited to questions for short debate (QSDs) as dinner break business (for one hour around 7.30pm) or last business (for one and a half hours). Thursdays tend to consist of the longer debates (as well as more QSDs). Fridays

are usually reserved for private members bills. QSDs may also be taken in Grand Committee, usually on Thursdays, where they will last one hour each.

232. Full information on anticipated timings can be seen in [Today's List](#) on the day of business, which will set out any time limits applicable to debates. [Today's List](#) also sets out the order of speakers for all the debates on a given day, and also includes the predicted time the Chamber and Grand Committee will rise.

### Questions for short debate

233. Questions for short debate (QSDs) are an important means by which backbenchers secure debates in the House of Lords Chamber or in Grand Committee. They are time limited to 60 or 90 minutes (the latter time applies if the QSD is taken as last business). The minister will respond at the end of the debate.

234. Full information on these can be found in the [House of Lords Companion to Standing Orders](#) and on the [Government Whips Office](#) website. However, brief notes from these follow:

### Timetabling

235. A member who wishes to ask a QSD must first table it with the clerks in the Lords Table Office.

236. The question is then printed in a [running list in House of Lords Business](#).

237. The Government Whips' Office offers time to members to ask QSDs in the order in which they appear in the waiting list in House of Lords Business. The slots available are the dinner breaks (often around 7.30pm) on most Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays and end of business on Thursdays (though other business, mainly motions in opposition to SIs, competes for this time) and on occasion in Grand Committee. They can also be timetabled as lunch break business.

238. In addition, the Grand Committee meets for a day of QSDs every six sitting weeks.

239. In a normal full session, on every Thursday from the beginning of the session until the end of January there is a topical question for short debate between the general debates (or after the general debate if there is only one), which is chosen by ballot.

240. For example, the QSD taken on 6 February 2017 was worded as follows in the House of Lords Business:

*Baroness Randerson to ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of Brexit on the transport sector in the United Kingdom. (Dinner break business, 1 hour)*

241. For an idea as to the time of the debate, please check the Order Paper or the [Today's List section](#) of the Government Whips Office website on the day.

## Structure

242. The questioner opens the debate, and is guaranteed 10 minutes to speak.

243. The minister responding to the question for short debate speaks last, and is guaranteed 12 minutes to speak.

244. The member who asks the question has no right of reply since no motion has been moved.

245. The length of time other members can speak is divided up equally according to the time limit.

## Longer Debates

### General debates (motions and resolutions)

246. In a normal full session, every Thursday from the beginning of the session until the end of January is set aside for general debates.

247. The mover of the motion for the debate opens the debate, and is entitled to a short reply at the end. At the end of their short speech in reply, the mover may either withdraw the motion or press it to a vote.

248. The minister is the penultimate speaker in the debate, and is usually preceded by the Opposition frontbencher.

249. There are two types of motion in these circumstances; resolutions and motions to take note:

- **Resolutions** are less common, and are put down in cases where a member wishes the House to come to a definite decision on a subject, if necessary on a vote. A resolution, if passed, constitutes the formal opinion or decision of the House on the matter
- Most debates take place on a **take note motion**: "That this House takes note of ..." This formula enables the House to debate a subject without coming to any positive decision. Such motions are usually agreed to, since they are neutral in wording, and there is neither advantage nor significance in opposing them. The opinion of the House is expressed in the speeches made in the debate rather than on a division. The formula is regularly used for debates on the general debate day and for select committee reports. It is also appropriate when a minister wishes to put down a neutral motion
- The wording of the motion can be seen in the [House of Lords Business paper](#)

## Balloted debates

250. One Thursday in each month from the start of the session to the end of December is set aside for two balloted debates. These balloted debates are limited to 2 and a half hours each, and their subjects should be narrow enough to be debated within the time limit. These debates may be initiated only by backbench and Crossbench Peers, and a Peer may initiate only one balloted debate per session.
251. The purpose of these debates is to provide a forum for discussion rather than questions which the House may decide on a division. They always take place on "take note" motions, which should be worded neutrally, and they follow the same structure as the general debates above.

## Time limits for debates

252. The House may limit debates, either in the House itself or in Grand Committee, to a specific number of hours. A business of the House motion in the name of the Leader of the House (of which notice is required) will be moved before the start of the debate if a time limit is applied. Within the overall limit, the amount of time allotted to particular speakers is calculated in advance and stated on the Speakers' list of that day. See '[Today's List](#)' on the day of the debate for these times.
253. Speaking time is allocated equally between all the speakers on the Speakers' list, subject to a guaranteed minimum number of minutes being given to the mover of the debate, the official Opposition frontbencher or frontbenchers and the minister replying.
254. If the debate is interrupted by other business (such as a statement or a division in the Chamber) the time limit is extended correspondingly.

## Further Information

<http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/role/debate/>

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/lords/work-of-the-house-of-lords/checking-and-challenging-government/>



# 10. Petitions

## SUMMARY

The chapter explains public Petitions and the process through the House of Commons and House of Lords. This chapter does not cover Private Petitions.

## NARRATIVE

255. A petition is a formal written request from one or more people to the Sovereign, the Government or Parliament.
256. A public petition is one made to the House of Commons and is a formal process involving sending a written appeal to an MP, following a set format, which is then presented to the Commons by the MP.
257. Only Members may present public petitions to the House.
- Generally, MPs will present all public petitions they receive from their constituents.
  - However, MPs are not obliged to present petitions and doing so does not imply that they support the action specified by the petition.
258. Petitions to the House, also known as ‘public petitions’, must be prepared in accordance with the House’s rules concerning form and content, which are available from the Journal Office.

### Informal and formal presentation

259. Presentation of public petitions can be informal or formal.
260. A Member can make an informal presentation any time when the House is sitting by placing them in a green bag on the back of the Speaker’s Chair.
261. Alternatively, Members can present a petition on the Floor of the House.
- The presentation takes place immediately before the end-of-day adjournment debate or, on Fridays, at the start of the day’s business
  - The Member is called and may make a brief statement (not a speech) outlining who the petition is from, what it concerns and the number of signatories. They conclude by reading out the ‘prayer’, which sets out what the petitioners are requesting
  - No other Member may speak

## Publication

262. The text of a petition which has been formally presented is set out in full in the next edition of Hansard immediately after the Member's remarks.
263. The texts of petitions presented informally appear in Hansard after the day's proceedings, in a section before written statements.
264. Under Standing Order No. 156, a copy of the petition, once printed, is sent to the appropriate Government department. All substantive petitions should receive a response from the relevant minister, in the form of an observation (or a notification that the Government does not have responsibility) within two months.
- Any observations made by a minister in reply are printed in Hansard after written statements and a copy is sent to the Member who presented the petition by the Journal Office
  - Copies of petitions and observations are also sent to the relevant select committee of the House, to decide whether to put the petition onto its formal agenda, although that committee has discretion as to whether to take action, and will not usually consider individual cases

## E-Petitions

265. The process for formal parliamentary petitions involving hard copy signatures differs from the e-petitions system jointly established by the Government and Parliament in 2014.
266. E-petitions may be created by members of the public on the Parliament website here: <https://petition.parliament.uk/>
267. The House of Commons Petitions Committee monitors e-petitions and decide which should be debated. Information about the work of the Petitions Committee is available [here](#).
- The Committee Clerks advise the relevant Government department when a petition reaches 10,000 signatures, at which point a Government response should be provided within 14 days. Government responses are published on the e-petitions website.
  - If a petition reaches 100,000 signatures, the petition becomes eligible for a debate and the Petitions Committee has the power to schedule it for debate in Westminster Hall on a Monday from 4.30pm, for up to three hours.

## Further Information

<https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/sign-a-petition/>  
<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/petitions-committee/>

## House of Lords

268. A member of the Lords may present a petition to the House of Lords—reading out who the petition is from and what action the petitioner(s) wish the House to take. To start a petition to the House of Lords, contact should first be made with a member of the House of Lords to find out if they would be willing to present the petition.

# 11. Parliamentary Passes and Access to the Estate

## SUMMARY

Government departments (usually via the Parliamentary Clerk) liaise with Parliament (via the Pass Office) regarding departmental officials who require access to the Palace of Westminster to conduct official business. Any disputes or queries should be made to the Serjeant at Arms (House of Commons) or Black Rod's Office (House of Lords) in the first instance. Whitehall-wide issues are usually raised with the Leader's Office (House of Commons), often through the Parliamentary Clerks' Working Group, who will address issues with the House Authorities as appropriate

Parliamentary branches also provide advice to officials on the rules governing access to the Palace, and rules and conventions when attending.

This chapter will help you to understand:

1. When you need a pass and the type of pass required
2. How to get a pass
3. Which areas you are restricted to with your particular pass

## NARRATIVE

### Public access to the Houses of Parliament

269. Many areas that civil servants need to access in Parliament are public areas. Civil servants without parliamentary passes can, therefore, enter through public entrances, submitting to security searches. Officials should always allow plenty of time to reach their destination but they are able to use "fast track" lanes at the busier security points on production of witness letters (for select committees) or departmental passes (for other business). Parliamentary security is run by the House authorities and civil servants should always show understanding for their rules and systems.

### Day Passes – both Houses

270. Civil servants who need to attend restricted areas of Parliament on official business, and who are cleared to at least CTC level, can apply for an unescorted day pass. A day pass is required for unescorted access to restricted areas of the parliamentary estate, for example:

- Ministerial and Members' offices (both Houses)

- Lower ministerial conference rooms (Large Ministerial Conference Room, Small Ministerial Conference Room)
- Journal Office
- Library corridor
- West Front Corridor and Ministerial offices (Lords)
- Public Bill Offices
- Vote Office (Commons) and
- Printed Paper Office (Lords)

271. Parliamentary branches should contact the Pass Office ([passoffice@parliament.uk](mailto:passoffice@parliament.uk)) to request a day pass, stating:

- Name of official
- Level of security clearance
- Date of visit (and time if outside pass office hours of 8am to 6pm)
- Where on the estate they are required to attend

272. To collect a day pass, officials should present their departmental pass or another form of official photo ID (e.g. passport or driving licence) at the pass office (located at Canon Row or Black Rod's Garden). The opening hours for these pass offices are:

Canon Row pass office:

Monday to Thursday – 8am to 6pm  
Friday – 8am to 4pm

Black Rod's Garden pass office:

Monday to Thursday – 8am to 6pm  
Friday – 8am to 4pm

Times during recess for both pass offices: 8am – 4pm

## Box permits

273. Procedures have been put in place to allow officials without CTC clearance access to the officials' box in the House of Commons so that they can support ministers on the floor of the House. The parliamentary branch should put the officials' names on to the box list (see below for details) and these officials will be able to collect a box permit from the Admissions Order Office (off Central Lobby). This permit should be shown to doorkeepers and/or police officers between the public area and the back of the Speaker's chair, who will watch officials walk to their destination.

## Photo passes

274. An official who needs to access the estate frequently (i.e. more than once a week) may be able to obtain a photo pass which allows full and unmoderated access to the parliamentary estate for business purposes. In order to apply for a photo pass, officials must be security cleared to CTC level. Passes are issued for

a period of no longer than 12 months and only for the amount of time the pass is required (which may be less).

275. To request a pass, the official should complete an SQ8 form, available from their departmental sponsor (each department should have separate guidance for officials about who this is) and return this form to the sponsor for their completion. The sponsor will certify the form and provide evidence of security clearance.

276. A photo pass with escort status can be issued to a limited number of Private Office staff on the basis that the holder will regularly be escorting guests within the palace precincts for ministers. Escort pass holders must remain with the person being escorted at all times and are responsible for their behaviour. The person being escorted must be escorted off the estate or to a public area once business is concluded. The Pass Office keeps a record of who has an escort pass and will not issue more than the allowed number in each Government department. (Sponsors may request to see this list.)

## Sponsors

277. The departmental sponsor is often, but not always, the Parliamentary Clerk. New sponsors should contact the Pass Office when taking up their post so that pass office records can be updated.

## RULES AND TOOLS

### Chambers

278. To attend the Officials Box in either House the individual must be on the box list for the day and be in possession of a day pass/permit. The parliamentary team is responsible for supplying the list of officials providing Ministerial support to the Doorkeepers in the Commons or the Lords.

279. There is a maximum of 8 places available in the **House of Commons** – more names may be put on the list (e.g. a rota for a longer debate) and officials may wait in the corridor until a space becomes available. A separate email/letter should be submitted for each individual piece of business.

280. Officials attending the **House of Lords** on business are accommodated in space to the right of the Throne. There is a box here with 4 places, although additional chairs are available. Seats here should be reserved no less than an hour before the start of business by emailing a list of names to Black Rod's Office and [holchamberbookings@parliament.uk](mailto:holchamberbookings@parliament.uk).

281. The Officials' Boxes are in effect part of the Chambers of each House, and as such, are subject to the jurisdiction of the Speaker in the Commons and answerable to Black Rod in the Lords. The Leaders of both Houses take any complaints against officials very seriously.

282. Officials are subject to strict rules of etiquette. The following points should be remembered:

- Officials should respect the same dress code as Members. For men, a jacket and tie is expected; for women, the equivalent level of formality should be observed
- Electronic devices may be used with care and discreetly
- Officials should enter and leave the box as quickly and quietly as possible and should only enter the box at the direction of the doorkeepers, whose instructions must be followed at all times
- Eating and drinking is strictly forbidden
- Officials must not react in any way to anything said in debate
- Members who are not Ministers or Parliamentary Private Secretaries (PPS) to ministers may not seek information from officials in the box unless asked to do so by a minister. Government Whips in the Lords may communicate with officials in the Lords Chamber and notes can be passed to the Front Bench via Doorkeepers in the Lords' Chamber.

### **Westminster Hall and Committee Rooms**

283. For debates in Westminster Hall, names of officials who are supporting ministers should be submitted to the Principal Doorkeeper before the morning of the debate.

284. During public bill and delegated legislation committees, officials sit to the right of Chairman. No special permission is needed for these seats. During select committee appearances officials sit behind the minister giving evidence.

285. Doorkeepers are responsible for keeping order in the Committee. They are distinctively dressed in white tie, tails and a large gold badge. Officials should follow any instructions they give.

286. In Committee, the following should be noted:

- Always go to your seats in the room by passing behind, not in front, of the Chair, watching out for obstructions
- Never walk behind the Chair while he or she is addressing the Committee i.e. when he or she is standing
- Ensure that there is enough space for you to sit down before walking behind the Chair. In any doubt, the Doorkeeper will be able to tell you if there is room
- There are usually three seats available for officials on the dais to the right of the Chair plus a couple more in the corner behind the dais. If there is a shortage of space, officials can sit in the public gallery, but will not be able to assist the Minister from there
- Officials should respect the same dress code as Members. For men, a jacket and tie is expected; for women, the equivalent level of formality should be observed
- Electronic devices may be used discreetly, but no laptops are permitted in the box

- Officials pass advice to Ministers by way of notes - passed discreetly via the Minister's PPS. If no PPS is present, the Minister should ask another Member to undertake this role
- Never enter the body of the committee room

### Grand Committee (aka 'The Moses Room') in the Lords

287. The parliamentary branch should send the list of officials who need to attend Grand Committee (no more than 5 names) to [holchamberbookings@parliament.uk](mailto:holchamberbookings@parliament.uk), no less than an hour before the main Chamber sits.

288. As for the Lords Chamber, officials are expected to enter and leave the officials area quickly and quietly whilst observing the same dress code already mentioned above. There are 5 seats directly behind the Minister where officials can sit and pass notes/whisper quietly to the Minister sitting in front. There is no need to communicate via a Whip or Doorkeeper. You should also note that hand-held electronic devices (but not laptops) may be used on silent mode.

### Booking meeting rooms

289. The rules on the use of House of Commons meeting rooms specify that they cannot be booked for Government ministry meetings. Ministers can book meeting rooms on the Estate in relation only to their parliamentary duties. Ministers do have particular use of the Large Ministerial Room in the Palace of Westminster which can be booked for departmental business only. Meetings must be attended throughout by the Minister making the booking.

### Catering facilities

290. There are limited catering facilities available to staff who are working in Parliament a whole day.

- The Jubilee Cafeteria (off Westminster Hall) is the only restaurant facility available to day pass holders and is not open in the evenings
- Debate (Portcullis House) open 8:30am to 5:30pm to pass holders
- Terrace Cafeteria – (only restaurant available in the evening). Pass holders may not eat here between 12:00pm and 2:00pm
- House of Lords cafeteria (the River Restaurant) - any pass holder can access the restaurant

291. Officials with passes are not allowed access to the Commons Terrace at any time. Similar rules apply for access to the House of Lords Terrace.

### Further Information

The Pass Office (Derby Gate) may be contacted on 0207 219 5920. The Serjeant at Arms can be contacted on 0207 219 3040. Black Rod's Gate pass office can be contacted on 0207 219 6990. Lists for the Officials Box in the House of Commons should be e-mailed



to the Speaker's Office or to the Principal Doorkeeper for Westminster Hall business. The list for the Lords should be emailed to: [holchamberbookings@parliament.uk](mailto:holchamberbookings@parliament.uk).

Any late list after the following times should first be notified to the HOL Doorkeepers on 0207 219 3189: Monday, Tuesday after 2:00pm; Wednesday after 2:30pm; Thursday after 10:30am and Friday after 9:30am.

# Additional guidance - Legislation

292. The Guide to Parliamentary Work should be read alongside the many other sources of guidance made available by the Government and the Parliamentary authorities.

293. For guidance on legislation please refer to:

## Guide to Making Legislation

294. This guidance sets out what bill teams need to do at each stage of preparing primary legislation and taking it through Parliament, from bidding for a slot in the legislative programme to gaining Royal Assent. This guide has been prepared by the Secretariat to the Parliamentary Business and Legislation Committee of Cabinet, with the advice of Parliamentary Counsel and the Offices of the Chief Whips, Leader of the House of Commons, Leader of the House of Lords and the Public Bill Offices of both Houses.

295. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-making-legislation>

## Statutory Instruments Practice (SIP)

296. SIP is a practice guide for those involved in preparing and making SIs. It is produced by the Legislation Services team at The National Archives.

297. Available at:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/f0051073-si-practice-5th-edition.pdf>