



HOUSE OF COMMONS

PARLIAMENT 2017

Business of the House and its Committees

June 2017

Business of the House and its Committees

A short guide to the business of the House and its committees – an introduction for new Members

Chamber and Committees Team (CCT)

Foreword

This guide is designed to help Members take part in the business of the House and its committees. There is usually no substitute for face-to-face discussions with the staff responsible for each day-to-day operation. So I would also encourage you to get in touch with the specific office as soon as you decide, or are required, to get involved in a new area of activity. You will be able to identify the office you need via the information in this guide or by visiting the Procedural Hub located next to the Debate cafeteria in the Portcullis House Atrium. And in the first instance, I would encourage you to make direct contact yourself.

David Natzler

Clerk of the House

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The fuller, and bicameral, glossary is available at:
www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary

Suggestions for the further improvement of this guide are welcome, and can be sent to the Table Office, including by email to tableoffice@parliament.uk or handed in via the Procedural Hub.

Organisation and Timing of Business

Broadly speaking the Government determines the timing of business in the House. The Leader of the House announces each Thursday at Business questions what the business will be for the next week or two. Certain types of business, such as questions, statements and half-hour adjournment debates, are taken at regular times. The remainder may be divided into government and non-government business. The latter includes opposition day debates, backbench business debates, private Members' bills on certain Fridays, debates on Estimates and time set aside for private legislation.

Business in the Chamber usually follows the pattern set out below. However, the House can and does vary its business and/or practice to deal with unexpected events. Other variations are more predictable, for example, on the first day back after a recess, a 'Monday' timetable usually applies whatever day of the week it is. The main categories of business and their usual timings are set out in the following table.

Monday	Tuesday & Wednesday	Thursday	Type of business	Friday (if sitting)	Type of business
2.30pm	11.30am	9.30am	Prayers	9.30am	Prayers
c. 2.33pm	c.11.33am	c.9.33am	Private bills (unopposed)	c.9.33am	Private Members' Bills
c. 2.33pm	c.11.33am	c.9.33am	Question time (Prime Minister's questions start at noon on a Wednesday)		
3.30pm	12.30pm	10.30am	Urgent questions, ministerial statements, points of order (if any)	11.00am	Urgent questions, ministerial statements, points of order (if any)

Monday	Tuesday & Wednesday	Thursday	Type of business	Friday (if sitting)	Type of business
3.30pm <i>or later*</i>	12.30pm ¹ <i>or later*</i>	10.30am <i>or later*</i>	Preliminary business, including ten minute rule motions on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, but otherwise usually only a few minutes		
3.30pm <i>or later</i>	12.30pm <i>or later</i>	10.30am <i>or later</i>	Main business, Bills, motions and debates		
10.00pm	7.00pm	5.00pm	The 'moment of interruption' after which exempted or unopposed business, public petitions and the end-of-day half-hour adjournment debate	2.30pm	The 'moment of interruption' after which public petitions and the end-of-day half-hour adjournment debate

¹ On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, Ten Minute Rule Private Members' Bills may take up to 20 minutes (more if there is a division on one).

*If there are urgent questions or ministerial statements.

Business is exempt from interruption, or can start later, under standing orders or a 'Business of the House' order. The exempted business may continue for as long as the order specifies. Unopposed items can also be agreed at this time without debate (but not if objected to).

Conduct of Business

The order paper (summary agenda and order of business) lists almost all the House's business for a particular day, indicating how long is provided for each item (the maximum) and under what authority (order of the House, standing order, etc.). The order paper for a sitting cannot be altered once the House has risen on the previous sitting day. The arrangement of business may include a variation from usual timings effected by an order made on a previous day or earlier in the same sitting (though not usually without notice).

The House usually moves briskly from the conclusion of one item of business to the beginning of the next. The Member 'in charge' of a piece of business must be present and ready to ask the question, move the motion or present the bill when needed or the Speaker will move on to the next piece of business. Members who cannot be present, and have given the Speaker or the clerks notice, may arrange for colleagues to move some items on their behalf (but, for example, a Member cannot ask a balloted oral question on behalf of another).

Members can speak in the Chamber or Westminster Hall, if called to speak by the Speaker or Chair. Time limits on speeches are sometimes imposed. A Member can intervene briefly in another Member's speech, if they agree.

In normal circumstances divisions (votes) can occur at almost any moment after question time has finished, depending on the business. Typically a division will take around 12 minutes. In some cases divisions sought after the moment of interruption are deferred until the following Wednesday and conducted 'on paper' using a pink form marked up and handed in by each Member.

Substantive business is generally brought to an end at 'the moment of interruption'. After that there can be unopposed business taken 'on the nod' without special provision, and certain opposed decisions can be taken without debate (with any divisions being deferred). Other items can be taken after the moment of interruption if:

- a specific 'Business of the House' motion, or programme order, applies
- standing orders exempt the particular business from the usual constraints (often business relating to draft statutory instruments)

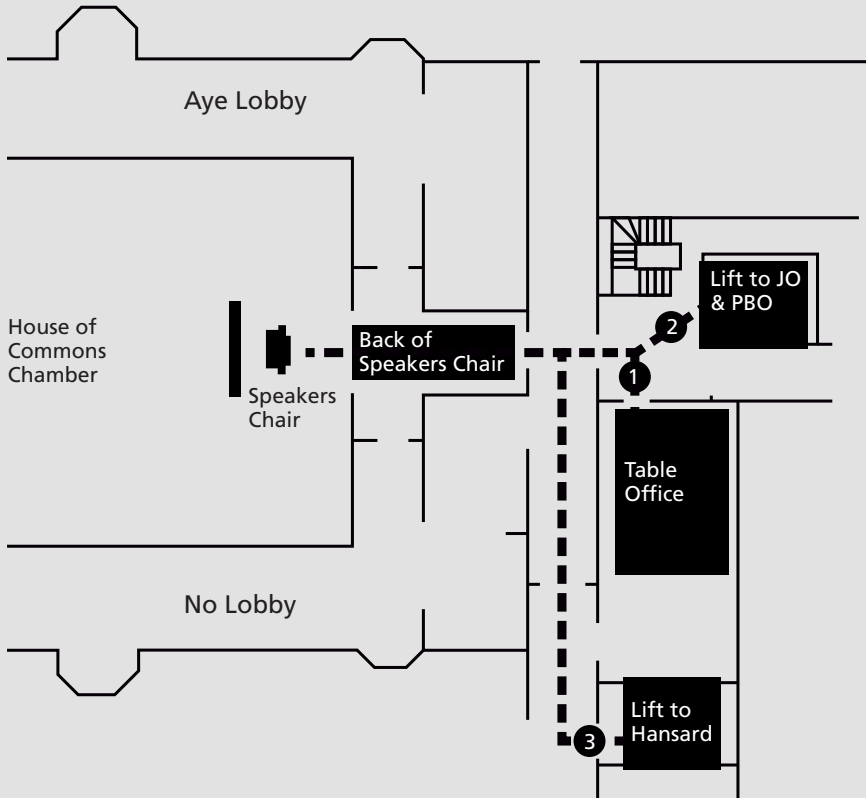
At the end of proceedings, petitions may be presented and the half-hour adjournment debate takes place.



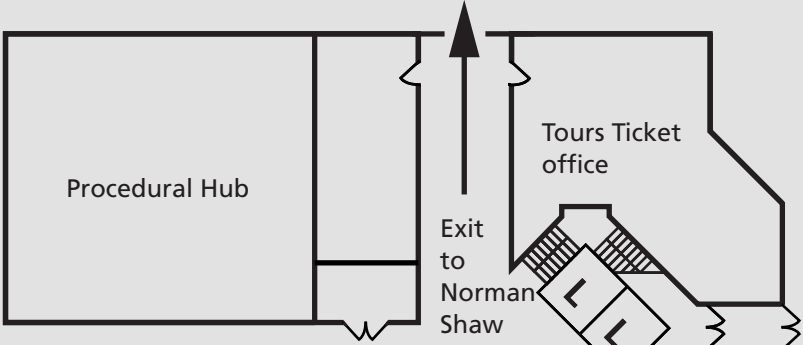
Where To Go For Advice

Type of business	Responsible office
Any	Procedural Hub – Portcullis House Atrium between the Debate Cafeteria and the Vote Office. (See map below.) x7333
Amendments to motions on the order paper, subjects/titles of adjournment debates and notice of formal presentation of a public petition	Table Office (TO) Across corridor outside back of Speaker's Chair, on the right if coming out of the Chamber. Open until the rise of the House. (See map below.) x3302, x3303
Parliamentary questions (of all kinds except urgent questions)	
Early day motions and added names	
Urgent questions	Speaker's Office Far right-hand end of corridor outside 'Back of Speaker's Chair' if coming out of the Chamber. Open till the rise of the House. x5300
Emergency debates	
Adjournment debates	
Notice of a wish to speak in a debate, ask a supplementary question or a question following a ministerial statement	Table Office (TO) x3302, x3303
Public petitions (form, format and content)	Journal Office (JO) On 3 rd floor via lift across the corridor outside back of Speaker's Chair, near Table Office entrance. (See map below.) x3310, x3317
E-petitions	Clerk of the Petitions Committee On Principal Floor, near the Leader of the Opposition's office. x3275
All Commons stages of all public bills	Public Bill Office (PBO)
Delegated legislation committees	On 3 rd floor via lift across the corridor outside back of Speaker's Chair, near Table Office entrance. (See map below.)
Committee of Selection	x3257, x3254, x3253, x3258, x4921, x3256
Elections (e.g. select committee chairs)	
Divisions (e.g. errors, queries)	
Private legislation	Private Bill Office (PrivBO) As for the Public Bill Office, above. x6008, x1606
Official reporting of speeches in the Chamber, Westminster Hall and committee	The Official Report (Hansard) Chamber: Assistant Editors' Room, on mezzanine floor, via lift in Ladies Gallery staircase, halfway down corridor between back of Speaker's Chair and Speaker's Office. x2865, x2350, x5257 WH: x5522 Committee: x5762
Select committees	Clerk of relevant committee General inquiries: x1366 Select committee staff are based in 14 Tothill St.

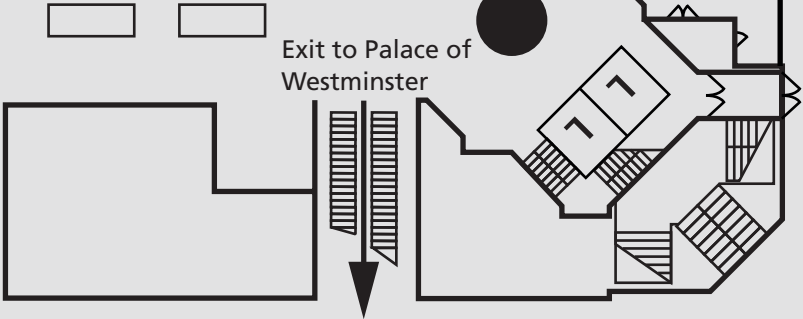
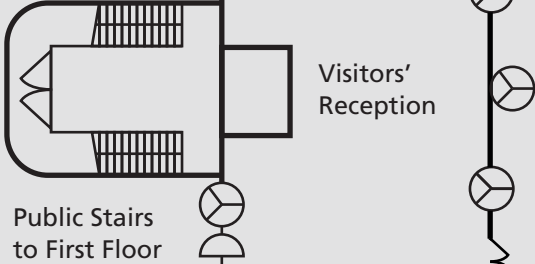
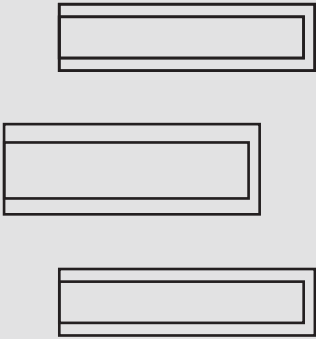
House of Commons Chamber



1. **Table Office**
Order paper, PQs, EDMs, general procedural inquiries
2. **Journal Office**
Public Petitions
3. **Public Bill Office (and Private Bill Office)**
All inquiries about all types of legislation, including tabling amendments and Private Members' bills



Portcullis House Atrium



Key Sources of Information

The key and core working document for House business each day is the summary agenda and order of business (the order paper). It can change right up to the moment the House rises on the previous sitting day so is worth checking each morning to avoid surprises. Business that is expected to be the subject of substantive debate is set out in **bold** type on the summary agenda. When packaged together with other documents relating to House and general committee business, it is referred to as the 'Vote Bundle'.

All documents referred to below are available from the Vote Office, via the Parliamentary website (www.parliament.uk and the [intranet](#)) and on the HousePapers app, which can be downloaded from the App Store or Google Play.

The best first port-of-call for advice on any aspect of business is the Table Office, just across the corridor at the back of Speaker's Chair, or the Procedural Hub in Portcullis House. If you are in the Chamber, the clerk(s) at the Table can also help.

Information on...	Printed documents (from Vote Office)	Online (parliament.uk website, intranet and apps) and other sources
<p>Today's business in the Chamber and Westminster Hall, written ministerial statements, all sittings of committees, committee reports being published and other announcements.</p>	<p>Order paper (summary agenda and part 1)</p>	<p>All relevant working papers: <i>Commons business papers</i>. Live feed from the Chamber on the annunciators and <i>Parliament TV</i>. <i>Hansard</i> reporting of proceedings in the Chamber is first available online after three hours.</p>
<p>Future business: business items with at least provisional dates; unscheduled business; and the rota of future oral Question Times</p>	<p>Order paper (part 1, announcements; part 2, calendar of business); remaining orders and notices (unscheduled business)</p>	<p><i>The Leader of the House's Business Statement</i> for the next two weeks each Thursday in the Chamber. <i>Future business</i> is then updated.</p>
<p>Yesterday's business</p>	<p>Debate: <i>Hansard</i> (Official Report) daily part. Decisions: Votes and Proceedings.</p>	<p><i>Hansard</i> <i>Votes and Proceedings</i></p>
<p>Tabled PQs</p>	<p>Blue pages of the Vote Bundle: notices of questions tabled the day before are printed on blue paper.</p>	<p><i>Q&A database</i> (all PQs and answers and written statements) <i>Questions guidance</i></p>
<p>Answers to PQs</p>	<p>Not printed. Individual Members are emailed their answers by the Q&A system. Answers are, however, collated daily and available online.</p>	
<p>Early day motions (EDMs)</p>	<p>Blue pages of the Vote Bundle (only new EDMs and/or those to which names have been added).</p>	<p><i>EDMs database</i> <i>EDMs guidance</i></p>

Public bills and amendments	<p>Amendment papers published for each day a bill is considered (in committee or in the Chamber); and a grouping and selection list showing how debate on amendments has been organised.</p>	<p><i>Bills and legislation database</i></p> <p><i>Progress of Public Bills list</i></p> <p><i>Bills and legislation guidance</i></p>
Private bills and related matters	<p>Private bills list. Information on private bills and associated committees (published weekly).</p>	<p><i>Bills and legislation database</i></p> <p><i>Private Bills List</i></p> <p><i>Private Business notices</i></p>
Statutory instruments, etc. (delegated legislation)	<p>Weekly statutory instruments list. All delegated legislation before the House and the time left for objection (published weekly).</p>	<p><i>Statutory Instruments List</i></p> <p><i>Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments</i></p> <p><i>Delegated legislation guidance</i></p>
European business	<p>Commons European business order paper lists European Union documents to be considered in the House and stages reached.</p>	<p><i>European Business order paper</i></p> <p><i>European Scrutiny Committee</i></p> <p><i>European business guidance</i></p>
Select committees	<p>Dates, times and places of meetings and publication of reports are listed on the order paper. Reports and evidence-taking are noted in an appendix to the <i>Votes and Proceedings</i>.</p>	<p><i>Select committees news</i></p> <p><i>Select committees list</i></p> <p><i>Select Committees: guide for Members</i></p>

The annunciator – screens and scroll bar – gives first notice of some information when not otherwise available, for example: some ministerial statements and urgent questions.

Taking part in House and Committee Business: Summary

The business of the House and its committees encompasses a wide range of activity. The table below sets out the key mechanisms you can use to take part, contribute, and develop and progress your own priorities.

The list is generally laid out in the order in which business takes place in the Chamber. The details, including about allocation arrangements and rules, are set out in the series of explanations that make up the bulk of this guide



Chamber business	Description
Oral questions	You can enter a ballot for the chance to have a question answered by a Minister in the Chamber and the opportunity then to ask a related supplementary, and you can seek to catch the Speaker's eye to ask a supplementary arising from a question asked by another Member.
Prime Minister's questions	You can enter a ballot for the chance to ask a question of the Prime Minister in the Chamber, without having to give notice of the subject.
Topical questions	You can enter a ballot for the chance to ask a question for answer by a Minister in the Chamber, without having to give notice of the subject.
Urgent question (UQ)	You can apply to the Speaker (in writing) seeking to ask an urgent question at the end of question time. However, strict criteria govern such applications.
Questions after ministerial statements	After an oral statement by a Minister, you can ask relevant questions, if called by the Speaker.
Business statement	You can ask the Leader of the House questions about House business (e.g. pressing for particular debates) after the Business statement each Thursday.
Private Members' bill (presentation)	You can present a bill to the House, without debate, before the start of the main business on a sitting day. Only long and short titles are required at this stage.
Private Members' bill (Ten minute rule)	You can apply to make a short speech in the Chamber (on a Tuesday or Wednesday) for leave to present a bill. The allocation of these slots is generally via an informal rota overseen by the whips.
Amendments to motions and bills	You can propose amendments to motions or bills being considered in the Chamber or in committee. The Speaker is responsible for selecting amendments for debate (or the Chair if in committee).
Backbench debate	You can apply to the Backbench Business Committee for a debate in the Chamber or Westminster Hall.
Public Petition	You can present a petition on behalf of a constituent, with brief remarks, on the floor of the House.
Adjournment debate (last half hour)	You can apply for a short debate at the end of a sitting and be answered by a Minister. These opportunities are allocated by the Speaker, mostly by ballot.

Committee Business

As a member of a committee:

Legislation committees	You can take part in detailed scrutiny of primary legislation and various kinds of delegated or secondary legislation on a committee established for each bill or instrument. Consult your whips about appointment to these committees.
Select committees	You can take part in detailed scrutiny of Government departments and/or work on a range of cross-cutting remits (for example, public accounts or human rights). Members' names are generally put forward for appointment following elections arranged by each party.

Other opportunities

Written questions	You can table parliamentary questions for written answer by the Government, asking for information or calling for action.
Early day motion (EDM)	You can table an EDM highlighting an issue and add your name, or table amendments, to other Members' EDMs. These motions are not expected to be debated.
Emergency debate	You can apply to the Speaker (in writing) for permission to make a brief speech in the Chamber seeking leave for an emergency debate on an urgent matter. However, strict criteria apply.
Private Members' bill (ballot)	You can put your name in to the ballot for one of the 20 Private Members' bill allocations. The top seven of these are guaranteed a day's second reading debate, having 'precedence' on sitting Fridays.

Procedure and Practice

Beginning of a new Parliament (chronological):

Opening of a new Parliament

On the day appointed by Royal Proclamation, the Members of both Houses assemble in their respective Chambers. The Commons are summoned to hear the Queen's Commission for opening and holding the Parliament read in the Lords Chamber.

The Commons return to their own Chamber, where their first business is to elect a Speaker. If the former Speaker is willing to be chosen again, a Member moves that he take the Chair and the question is then put without debate. (If a new Speaker has to be chosen, the House is adjourned until the following day, when there is a secret ballot.) After speeches of congratulations to the Speaker-elect, the House is adjourned.

On the following day, the Commons again proceed to the Lords Chamber, where the Royal approbation of the Speaker-elect is signified and the Speaker claims the Commons' ancient rights and privileges.

On the same day, Members begin to take the oath or affirm (see *Swearing in of Members*), starting with the Speaker, the father of the House, the Government front bench, the opposition front bench and other privy counsellors. One or two further days are usually set aside for swearing in. If any Members have not sworn in by then, this can be done immediately after prayers on later days.

State Opening, at which the Queen's Speech is delivered, takes place after the days for swearing in. There are customarily six days of debate on the Queen's Speech. The subjects for each day are announced by the Speaker on the first day. (The same happens at the beginning of each session of the Parliament.)

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303

Swearing in of Members

Members may take an oath or make a solemn affirmation. The texts of both are set out on large cards kept in the Dispatch Box. The oath or affirmation must be made initially in English but may then be repeated in Cornish, Irish Gaelic, Scots Gaelic or Welsh. Members take the oath holding the sacred text of their choice. Members may also take the oath in the Scottish manner.

Members returned at a General Election who take the oath after the days set aside at the start of a Parliament (see *Opening of a new Parliament*) normally do so immediately after prayers; Members taking the oath later in the Parliament, after a by-election, do so immediately before the main business, after questions and ministerial statements (if any). Notice of an intention to swear in should be given to the Journal Office. The new Member waits at the bar of the House and, when called, proceeds to the Table.

Members returned at by-elections require two sponsors, who accompany them from the bar of the House; the new Member must previously have collected a certificate relating to his or her election from the Journal Office to hand to the Clerk of the House beforehand.

If a Member sits during any debate after the Speaker has been chosen or votes without having taken the oath or affirmed, his or her seat is automatically vacated.

Contact: Journal Office, x3317

Members' interests

General

Members must disclose their interests in two ways. They must record certain interests in the Register. They must also draw attention to their interests by declaring them whenever they are relevant in a wide range of circumstances, including in parliamentary proceedings, meetings with Ministers, public officials and other Members and in correspondence. There are only limited exceptions.

The rules on these duties are strict and it is essential that every Member has a copy of the most up-to-date versions of both the Code of Conduct and the Guide to the Rules relating to the conduct of Members (see below).

Advice and guidance

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards maintains the Register of Members' Financial Interests and other registers of interests, and also provides confidential advice to Members and others on standards. If it was alleged that a named Member had broken the rules of the House, this would fall to the Commissioner to investigate, if the allegation fell within her remit and was supported by evidence.

In practice the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests advises on the disclosure of interests.

The Committee on Standards oversees the Commissioner's work in all these areas, and considers formal memoranda from the Commissioner following her investigations.

Registering interests

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards sends all new Members a registration form and a copy of the current rules of the House. New Members must complete and return this form within **one month** of their election. In order to help new Members to achieve this deadline, registry staff provide one-to-one briefings on the rules of the House, including the disclosure of interests. New Members can book a briefing by emailing standardscommissioner@parliament.uk.

After their initial register entry, Members must notify the registry within four weeks of any changes to their registrable interests.

Declaring interests

These rules concern the ad hoc disclosure of interests or declaration, which complement the requirements to register interests.

Members are required to declare their interests, if relevant, from the time of their election – even before they have submitted a register entry.

Members are expected to declare a wide-ranging selection of interests: they include not just direct and current interests but the interests of partners and family members, past interests up to one year old, and expected future interests.

Both registered and unregistered interests need to be considered for declaration.

Members must declare interests not just when speaking but, for example, when tabling questions and early day motions (EDMs), when requesting adjournment debates or emergency debates, when joining a select committee and when adding names to EDMs and other motions. In these circumstances an annotation will be included against the Member's name when it appears on the order paper or notice paper. Members should also declare relevant interests when booking catering facilities.

Paid advocacy

Paid advocacy is prohibited. Under the advocacy rule, a Member who has received a benefit such as hospitality, a gift or a payment must not engage in any parliamentary proceeding, or any approach to a Minister, other Member or public official which would benefit exclusively the person or organisation which provided them with that hospitality, gift or payment. The rule applies also if the payment, gift or hospitality was received by the Member's partner or relative.

Additional restrictions apply if a Member is initiating a parliamentary proceeding or an approach. Further details are provided in the Guide to the Rules, and advice is available from the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests and/or the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

Contact: Registrar of Members' Financial Interests, x3277

Further information: The Code of Conduct, together with the Guide to the Rules relating to the conduct of Members 2015

Election of select committee chairs

In the first weeks of the Parliament Members have the opportunity to elect the chairs of most select committees (broadly speaking, departmental select committees, most major scrutiny committees and the Backbench Business Committee have elected chairs).

Before this process can commence, the House must first allocate the posts of particular committee chairs to specific parties. The initial distribution of chairs between parties reflects their strength in the House and a motion allocating each Committee to a party is expected to be tabled within a week of the Queen's Speech. When that motion is agreed to, the Speaker announces the election timetable, including a deadline for nominations. Subject to confirmation by the Speaker,

the ballot must take place 14 days after the approval of the motion allocating chairs to parties. Nominations can be submitted as soon as the motion has been agreed by the House.

Members wishing to be candidates need to provide a signed statement declaring willingness to stand, which must be accompanied by the signatures of 15 Members from their own party (or 10% of Members of that party, whichever is lower). Signatures of up to five Members from other parties can also be provided, although these are optional. Candidates are required to declare any relevant interests with their nominations.

The ballot is usually held on a Wednesday between 10am and 5pm and is held in one of the committee rooms on the Committee Corridor. Members have their names recorded at temporary division desks before being issued with a ballot paper. Members can vote for their preferred candidates for each committee post using the Alternative Vote system (that is, ranking as many candidates as they wish by order of preference) and the ballot is kept secret. As soon as practicable after the closing of the ballot, the Speaker will announce to the House the successful candidate for each committee and the full results will be published. The Members elected formally take up their positions as chairs when the remaining members of the committees have been appointed by the House.

Contact: Clerk of Elections, Public Bill Office, x4921; Principal Clerk, Committee Office, x4355



Select committee membership

The memberships of committees with chairs elected by the House originate within the political parties who elect Members for their allocated places under internal arrangements (using secret ballots). These are then put before the House for confirmation (via the Committee of Selection). The memberships of committees whose chairs are not elected by the House are assembled by the Committee of Selection and are then proposed in the same way to the House for confirmation (these committees elect a chair from within their membership, usually at their first meeting).

These processes can take some weeks. While there is less time available on this occasion, after the general election in May 2015 the membership of the majority of scrutiny committees was agreed in July, enabling the committees to meet before the House rose for the summer.

Contact: your whips; Clerk of the Committee of Selection (Public Bill Office), x3256; the Clerk of Committees, x3313

Maiden speeches

Members who have not previously spoken on the floor of the House are usually called early in a debate, and are heard without interruption. As on other occasions, they should give notice of their intention to speak to the Speaker's Office. A maiden speech is usually uncontroversial, fairly brief and includes a tribute to the Member's predecessor, irrespective of party. It is also a tradition that speakers who follow praise the new Member's first contribution.

Members may take part in a wide range of parliamentary proceedings without affecting their right to make a maiden speech, including tabling and asking oral questions, asking supplementary questions, tabling questions for written answer and early day motions, presenting petitions, and taking part in public bill committees and select committees. However, if a Member speaks in debate in the House or Westminster Hall he or she may forfeit the right to be called to make a formal maiden speech.

Contact: The Speaker's Office, x5300 (notice); Table Office, x3302, x3303 (procedure).

Day-to-day (A-Z):

Adjournment debates

An adjournment debate (on the motion 'that the House [or sitting] do now adjourn') is simply a way of enabling a debate to take place but without a question which the House must then decide. Adjournment motions may occasionally be used for wide-ranging debates in the Chamber but it is now more common for debates to take place on a motion 'That the House has considered the matter of [topic]' (see *General debates*, below).

'End-of-day' or 'half-hour' adjournment debates

Applications for a half-hour adjournment debate should be submitted in writing to the Table Office by 7pm (or the rising of the House, if earlier) on a Wednesday for the following week. Thursday's subject is chosen by the Speaker; for other days, Members are selected by ballot conducted on a Thursday morning.

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303



Amendments (to motions and bills)

General

An amendment is a change proposed to a text under consideration by the House, or one of its committees, whether a motion, a bill or a draft select committee report. Certain business, such as the motion 'That the House has considered [a specified matter]' or a motion to approve a statutory instrument are not open to amendment because opposition can be most effectively expressed by simply voting against them.

Decisions on amendments are generally taken before decisions on the proposition which they would change (with the exception of amendments to motions moved by opposition parties on days set aside for their business (see Opposition days).

Form

In most amendments the form of words used is 'to leave out from A to B' (and to insert, or add, other words). In this format 'A' and 'B' are the words immediately before and after the proposed deletion rather than the first and last words deleted; so in this paragraph, line 1, leave out from 'In' to 'deletion' in line 3 means that 'most' would be the first word deleted and 'proposed' would be the last. If the amendment is leaving out six or fewer words, the words being deleted are set out in full.

Amendments to motions on the order paper

Tabling and notice

Amendments to motions on the order paper (including to early day motions) are tabled in the Table Office and the clerks in that office will advise on orderliness, form and content. The deadline for all material for the order paper is the rise of the House on the previous sitting day (even when a recess intervenes). The selection of amendments for debate is a matter for the Speaker and is usually announced at the beginning of the relevant debate.

Reasoned amendments on second (or third) reading of a bill

Amendments may be tabled on second reading of a bill which contain objections to the House giving the bill a second reading (commonly 'That this House declines to give a second reading to the [...] Bill because [reasons]'). Similar amendments may be tabled at third reading. Only one 'reasoned' amendment, however, can be moved

and debated at each stage of a bill (although more than one may be tabled and appear on the order paper). Such amendments should be discussed with the Public Bill Office first but are tabled in the Table Office. Deadlines and selection are as for other motions on the order paper.

Amendments to bills

Tabling

Amendments to bills may be tabled either in the Public Bill Office or the Procedural Hub or electronically from a parliamentary email address. It is recommended that Members contact the Public Bill Office to discuss the content of an amendment they wish to table, or to sign. On the day of second reading, amendments for committee may be handed in to the clerks at the Table in the Chamber as soon as the second reading is agreed (unless the House has agreed an earlier time, for example, when considering emergency legislation).

Drafting and publishing

The clerks in the Public Bill Office will advise on the drafting of amendments. Amendments tabled are numbered and published in hard copy and online overnight. They are published in the order to which they relate to the Bill being considered. This 'marshalled' amendment paper is updated whenever any new amendments are tabled, and is published on each day that the Bill is being considered in the House or a public bill committee.

Explanatory statements

Members tabling an amendment to a bill may also add an explanatory statement of not more than 50 words which should describe the intended effect of the amendment but must not be an argument for its adoption. The statement is printed in italics on the amendment paper immediately following the amendment to which it relates.

Notice

Three sitting days' notice is required, as a minimum, for amendments to a public bill whether in committee or on the floor of the House.

Tabled on	for consideration on
Monday	Thursday
Tuesday	Friday
Wednesday	Monday
Thursday	Tuesday
Friday	Wednesday

Amendments that are not tabled within the required notice period are 'starred' and, since adequate notice should be given, are rarely selected by the Chair.

Moving

Any Member may move an amendment on the order paper or amendment paper, whether or not his or her name has been put to it. An amendment to a bill in committee should be supported by at least one member of that committee.

Rules

Common reasons for an amendment being out of order are:

- it is outside the scope of the motion or the bill (determined by existing content)
- it involves finance not covered by a financial resolution (in the case of a bill) agreed by the House (which only a Minister can move)
- it would amount to voting against the motion or clause (it is a 'wrecking' amendment)
- it is unintelligible, ungrammatical, vague, offered to the wrong place (in the case of a bill), trifling or 'tendered in a spirit of mockery'.

Selection and grouping (in the case of a bill)

The Chair groups amendments for debate, and also has the power not to select amendments.

Amendments to bills to leave out clauses or schedules are not selected in committee, since a question is automatically put by the Chair on whether each clause and schedule should remain part of the bill. This does not apply at report stage, where there is no automatic question on each clause and schedule. Selection is generally more stringent at report stage than in committee. (See also *Bills - public bill committees*.)

The Chair's selection and grouping list is published online and in hard copy (in the No Lobby, the Table Office, the Vote Office and the Library) on the day that a bill is to be taken, or if possible the previous day.

Contact: Public Bill Office, x3251, x6758 (bills); Table Office x3302, x3303 (motions on the order paper and EDMs).

Backbench Business Committee

General

The Backbench Business Committee (BBCom) oversees various opportunities for backbench Members to bring forward debates of their choice on the floor of the House or in Westminster Hall. The committee has a limited allocation of time from the Government in which it can schedule subjects for debate, for which it has heard representations from backbench Members, in the Chamber.

BBCom can consider any subject for debate. This includes subjects raised in national or local campaigns, reports by select committees and other groups and issues suggested by constituents.

Requesting a debate

To request a debate, Members must submit a *BBCom application form* by 12 noon on the Friday preceding the Tuesday meeting at which they propose to present their case for the debate to the Committee. These meetings are conducted in public.

Selecting topics

The committee has limited time to schedule for debates and it is not possible to meet all requests. The Committee selects topics for debates on their merits and considers criteria including:

- topicality, priority and timing
- popularity and potential participation
- whether debate of the relevant topic may arise via some other route

Timing

The Government decides which days of the week will be given to the Backbench Business Committee for its debates and the amount of time available varies each month. Once BBCom has selected a topic for debate, it will be allocated to one of the available days and the details published via the *Future Business*.

In weeks where no time is available for Backbench Business, the Committee will postpone taking a decision until more time becomes available.

Contact: Clerk of the Backbench Business Committee, x3302, x3303 (Table Office).

Bills – hybrid

A hybrid bill is a public bill which affects a particular private interest in a different way from the private interests of other persons or bodies in the same category. Some of the private business standing orders apply to such bills (see *Private legislation*) and they are subject to certain proceedings in addition to the normal stages that a public bill has to pass through.

Contact: Private Bills Office, x6008.

Bills – private Members'

Introduction

Formally, a 'private Member' is any Member who is not a Minister. There are three ways for private Members to present bills:

- the ballot procedure
- the ten minute rule procedure
- by formal presentation

Bills presented as a result of the ballot have an advantage in securing time for debate. The ten minute rule procedure provides the opportunity to make a short speech in the Chamber in prime time on a subject of the Member's choosing. Even presenting a bill formally provides a publicity opportunity for its objective and any associated campaigning.

To present a bill, only the short title and long title (the latter describing the content or proposed content of the bill) are needed, and there is no obligation ever to provide a text. However, until a text has been provided and the bill has been published, the bill cannot proceed to second reading. Bills cannot be published before they have been presented.

Ballot for private Members' bills ('PMBs')

Twenty Members are selected by ballot to present bills which take precedence on the 13 sitting Fridays allocated to PMBs. The ballot is held on the second Thursday in each session: in 2017 this will be **Thursday 29 June**. Members enter the ballot by signing a book placed in the No Lobby during sitting hours of the Tuesday and Wednesday before the ballot. Twenty names are drawn. However, only the first seven are guaranteed a day's debate for second reading as there are only seven Fridays where second readings take precedence over other stages.

The bills are presented, in ballot order, on the fifth Wednesday of the session, which in 2017 will be **Wednesday 19 July**, and the Member in charge of each bill gets the opportunity to name a day for second reading in turn. No commitment to a particular subject is required

until the day before presentation, when notice must be given of the short and long titles.

It is recommended that the 20 successful Members consult the Clerk of Private Members' Bills as soon as possible after the ballot about their options.

Ten minute rule bills

Notice

After the ballot bills have been presented, Members may give notice for ten minute rule slots. Notice of this must be given in person to the Public Bill Office not more than 15 sitting days (including non-sitting Fridays, so usually three weeks), and not less than five sitting days, in advance. In practice, the opportunity is almost invariably taken up at the first possible moment.

The Public Bill Office takes a notice from the first Member to hand one in at 10am on the relevant day. After the first of these days there is an informal rota arrangement overseen by the whips. On the first such day, Members traditionally make a variety of efforts to be first to hand in a notice of a ten minute rule motion (and, often, notices of presentation bills).

The notice of motion for a ten minute rule bill can be changed up to five sitting days before the motion is to be made.

Procedure and choreography

When the Member is called (soon after 12.30pm on a Tuesday or Wednesday or after any urgent questions or ministerial statements, etc.) the following procedure is followed:

- the Member makes a short speech (up to ten minutes) explaining why the bill is needed
- another Member can make a short speech opposing the motion (in which case there may be a division and tellers will be needed)
- if the House agrees that a bill may be introduced, the Speaker asks the Member moving the motion: 'Who will prepare and bring in the Bill?'
- the Member reads out the names of the supporters (if any), adding "and myself, Mr Speaker"

- the Member goes to the bar of the House:
 - turns towards the Speaker
 - advances five paces (mid-Chamber), bows
 - advances five more paces (at the Mace), bows again
 - advances up the Government side of the Table and hands the dummy bill to the Clerk of the House
- the Clerk reads the short title, and the Speaker asks: 'Second Reading what day?' and the Member names a day (generally one of the Fridays set aside for private Members' bills).

Presentation

After the ballot bills have been presented on the fifth Wednesday of the session, any Member may present a bill, formally, on a sitting day. The deadline for notice is before the rise of the House on the previous sitting day (but earlier consultation with the Public Bill Office is recommended and very helpful). Notice must be given in writing and include the short and long titles. On the day of presenting a bill, a 'dummy bill' must be collected from the Public Bill Office (not later than 3pm on a Monday, 12 noon on a Tuesday or Wednesday or 11am on a Thursday). Presentation takes place at the time of preliminary business (3.30pm or later on Monday, 12.30pm or later on Tuesday or Wednesday; 10.30am or later on Thursday; and after prayers on Friday).

The Member should be standing behind the Speaker's Chair on the Government side until called by the Speaker. Then:

- the Member steps forward along the Government side of the Table, bowing to the Speaker on the way, and hands the dummy bill to the Clerk of the House
- the Clerk reads the short title
- the Speaker asks "Second Reading what day?"
- the Member names a day (generally one of the Fridays set aside for private Members' bills).

General

A Member may not, except in the case of ballot bills, present a bill on behalf of another, and may not move a ten minute rule motion on behalf of another.

A bill may have – but does not need – up to 11 Members as ‘supporters’, in addition to the Member in charge. Supporters’ names must be provided to the Public Bill Office before presentation in time to be entered on the dummy bill, and cannot be added or removed after presentation.

The printing of bills after they have been presented is arranged by the Public Bill Office and the Clerk of Private Members’ Bills can offer Members advice on how to prepare a bill text. The Member in charge is entitled to up to 30 copies, which are available from the Vote Office.

Content

Subject to one principal exception, private Members’ Bills can relate to any subject matter that is suitable for public legislation. The exception is that a private Member’s Bill may not have as its main purpose the creation of a: (a) ‘charge upon the people’ (a new tax, a tax increase or a similar kind of charge) or (b) ‘charge upon the public purse’ (the establishment of a new cause for public expenditure).

A private Member’s bill may contain provisions with financial implications, provided that they are only ancillary to the main purpose. Even so, such provisions need to be authorised by a financial resolution agreed by the House following second reading and only a Minister can move the appropriate motion. A public bill committee cannot consider a bill, or those parts of a bill, that require a financial resolution until one has been agreed by the House.

Progress

There are 13 Fridays set aside for the consideration of private Members' bills as per standing orders. The first seven days are invariably taken up by second readings. After this, bills are allocated precedence on any particular day according to how much progress they have made (the most advanced come first – e.g. those with Lords Amendments would appear before a third reading). Bills not reached by 2.30pm on a private Members' Friday are called, but can make progress only if no Member objects.

Effective organisation and tactics may be needed for progress to be made through the various stages. The steps to be taken can depend heavily on the particular expectations and objectives of the Member in charge. Advice on the procedures, and their implications, should be sought from the Clerk of Private Members' Bills in the Public Bill Office.

Lords private Members' bills

Lords private Members' bills brought to the Commons can be 'taken up' by any Member by giving notice to the clerks at the Table in the House and naming a day for second reading.

Contact: Clerk of Private Members' Bills, Public Bill Office, x3254.



Bills – programming and timetabling

General

Programme orders set out a timetable for the conclusion of proceedings on a Government public bill, and may cover all stages after second reading, including Lords amendments. If a Minister gives notice of a programme motion before second reading of the bill to which it relates, it may then be moved and decided immediately after second reading. (The scope of the second reading debate allows reference to the merits and terms of a relevant programme motion.)

The questions on subsequent motions to vary the timetabling or extend it to later stages are generally also put without debate.

Duration of debate

A programme motion sets a time for conclusion of specified proceedings or provides for their duration. Business covered by a programme order (and any debate on programme motions themselves) may continue for the time allocated regardless of standing orders requiring sittings to be brought to an end at certain times.

Procedure

When the time allocated for a debate subject to a programme order expires, the debate ends and the House only takes decisions needed to dispose of the business (generally including amendments for separate decision).

In committee

A programme order will specify a date when proceedings in a public bill committee must conclude and a programming sub-committee of the committee (consisting of the Chair and seven members nominated by the Speaker) may make proposals about the number of sittings and timing of proceedings, which the committee may debate for up to half an hour and amend.

Guillotine motions

A bill which is not made subject to a programme order at the time of second reading may subsequently be timetabled, but in that case the timetabling motion is known as an allocation of time motion, or 'guillotine', and may be debated for up to three hours.

Such a motion may also be moved before the second reading of a bill, if that second reading is itself to be timetabled.

Contact: Clerk of Programming, Public Bill Office, x3253.

Bills – public bill committees

General

Public bill committees (PBCs) go through bills committed to them clause by clause and schedule by schedule, debating, and sometimes agreeing to, amendments, new clauses and new schedules. PBCs on Government bills may also start by taking oral evidence from interested parties and can receive and publish written evidence throughout the process.

A separate public bill committee is established for each bill considered. Members are nominated by the Committee of Selection, and membership will reflect the party composition of the House and debate at second reading (views and participation) may also be taken into account. Members appointed to a PBC are informed immediately (see *Committee of Selection*). The Public Bill Office provides procedural information and support for members of a PBC, and the Scrutiny Unit distributes a briefing for oral evidence sessions.

Chairs are appointed by the Speaker (from the Panel of Chairs) and act impartially to ensure that all PBCs follow the rules of the House consistently.

Sittings

Sittings are in public. When considering a bill, debate is formal, as in the House (with seating arranged in a similar pattern to the Chamber), and Members should refer to each other by constituency (not by name). The Chair, however, is referred to by name. When taking oral evidence, proceedings are less formal in a committee room arranged as in a select committee (see *Committees – select*).

Advice on the procedures to be followed in each case can be obtained from the clerks in the Public Bill Office, one of whom will always be present during sittings of the committee, on the Chair's left.

The timing of meetings after the first are usually regulated by a programme or sittings motion. The first item of a PBC's business is usually to agree such a motion proposed by the programming sub-committee or the (private) Member in charge of the bill.

PBCs on Government bills will usually sit on Tuesdays and Thursdays in a room on the first floor's Main Committee Corridor. PBCs on private Members' Bills usually sit on Wednesdays.

Timings are as follows:

	Morning	Afternoon
Tuesdays & Wednesdays	8.55am – 11.25am (mandatory finish)	2.00pm – c.5.00pm (customary finish)
Thursdays	11.30am – c.1.00pm (customary finish)	2.00pm – c.5.00pm (customary finish)

To protect Members' attendance at question time, PBCs are not allowed to sit between 11.25am and 1.30pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and between 9.25am and 11.30am on Thursdays (subject to some leeway for the Chair to bring 'live' matters to a conclusion).

Proceedings

The order of proceedings in a public bill committee is as follows:

- consideration of a motion to agree a programme or sittings motion (if any), which may include provision to vary or confirm the order in which the clauses and schedules are to be considered
- oral evidence sessions (if any)
- 'line by line' consideration, proceeding through the bill (as it is or according to the order of consideration as set out in the programme order²)

² The most common change made by an 'order of consideration' is to enable debate of each schedule to occur immediately after debate of the clause which first, or principally, refers to it.

Members nominated to a PBC are provided with a note on how this 'line by line' consideration proceeds.

Divisions in committee

In a division in committee, the doors of the room are locked as soon as both whips signal they are content, or two minutes after a question is put, whichever comes first. Members remain in their seats.

The Clerk reads aloud the names of the Members in alphabetical order, and Members say 'Aye', 'No' or 'No vote' as their names are called. Any corrections must be made before the Chair announces the result.

Papers

Amendment papers, setting out the text of each proposed amendment, can be obtained from the Vote Office, are made available in the committee room, and are published on the relevant Bill pages of the website. On the day after a sitting, the part of the amendment paper dealt with is republished online with a note against each amendment indicating how it was disposed of. A public bill committee Hansard report for each sitting is published online and copies are available in the committee room and from the Vote Office. Copies of the Chair's selection list (see below) are available in the committee room and online.

Selection and grouping of amendments

The Chair has power of 'selection' (see *Amendments (to motions and bills)*) and will 'group' amendments for debate, with the aim of as orderly, logical and efficient an arrangement as possible which makes the best use of the committee's time. When amendments have been grouped, the debate takes place on all the amendments in a group when the first is reached (in proceeding through the bill). The question on that first amendment is put at the end of the debate on the group; other amendments in the group (if moved) are dealt with formally when their place in the bill is reached. They may be divided on (at the Chair's discretion) but not further debated.

Contact: Public Bill Office, x3251, x6758, x3253, x2354 (ask to speak to the Clerk of the public bill committee you are interested in); for inquiries about membership call x1366.

Bills – private (see private legislation)

Bills – public

Stages of consideration

Public bills, whether promoted by the Government or private Members, pass through the following stages:

- Presentation and first reading – purely formal, without debate (except for ten minute rule bills). Government bills are normally published the day after presentation.
- Second reading – the House debates the principle of the bill and a broad debate is permitted. Any financial resolutions needed are usually taken immediately afterwards in the case of Government bills. Scope of debate on second reading covers the merits and terms of programme motions to be taken immediately afterwards and such motions are generally decided without separate debate (see *Bills – programming and timetabling*).
- Bills are generally committed to a public bill committee (see *Bills - public bill committees*). Some bills, including bills of major constitutional importance and very urgent legislation, are committed to a Committee of the whole House.
- Consideration (or report) stage – an opportunity for the House as a whole to consider what has been done in committee and to amend the bill further. If the bill was amended in committee, it will normally have been reprinted. There is no requirement to re-agree all the clauses and schedules, so only those parts of the bill which Members are seeking to amend are debated. At this stage new clauses and new schedules are usually taken before textual amendments (There is no report stage if the bill was considered wholly in Committee of the whole House and not amended.)
- Third reading – usually taken immediately after consideration. Debate is confined to the contents of the bill.

Proceedings in the Lords

Bills which originate in the Commons must pass through a similar pattern of proceedings in the House of Lords (and vice versa). After both Houses have concluded consideration, bills are returned to the House of origin for any differences to be resolved.

- Lords Amendments (if any) – the Commons has to reach a decision on each Lords Amendment. Motions may be made to agree or disagree with, amend or provide an alternative to individual Lords Amendments. If necessary, the bill passes backwards and forwards between the two Houses until all points of disagreement are resolved; the bill is then ready for Royal Assent. Lords Amendments and any Commons motions relating to them are published as separate papers. Lords Amendments are debated in groups of related amendments proposed by the ‘Member in charge’ of the bill. Amendments to Lords Amendments are subject to selection by the Speaker in the same way as other amendments to bills (Commons amendments to bills which started in the Lords also need to be agreed by the other House).

Information about Bills

The full text of bills, any accompanying explanatory notes, amendment papers and other relevant papers are available on the parliamentary website under ‘Bills and Legislation’ via the ‘Parliamentary Business’ section, and from the Vote Office.

Contact: Public Bill Office, x3251, x6758.

Further information: Bills and legislation database, Progress of Public Bills list, Bills and legislation guidance.

Business statement

The business for the forthcoming week, and provisionally for the week after, is announced by the Leader of the House at 10.30am or later on Thursdays (usually straight after question time, but later if other statements are made first). Notice is given on the order paper of the ‘Business Question’. The Leader of the House answers questions relating to the announcements made and can be asked to arrange debates on other matters of concern to backbench Members (e.g. the subjects of early day motions). The contents of the business statement are available in the Vote Office shortly afterwards and the details are published formally in Future Business the following day and via the UK Parliament website.

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303

Chamber

Seating

No places are formally allotted to particular Members, though by custom the two front benches nearest the Speaker on each side of the House are reserved for Ministers and spokespersons of the official Opposition (and other long-serving Members have preferred locations). Seats can be reserved formally by obtaining a green 'prayer card' from an attendant in the Chamber (at any time between 8am and prayers) and leaving it upon a seat, indicating the Member's intention to acquire that seat by sitting there at prayers. By attending at prayers, and placing the card in a slot above the seat, the seat is secured for the rest of the sitting. Members attending committees may secure seats by placing pink cards on them. Members may not speak from beyond the bar of the House or a gallery.

Advice

The clerks at the Table are responsible for advising the Chair and are available to give instant procedural advice to any Member on any aspect of the business before the House. Members with less immediate inquiries may, in the first instance, wish to consult the clerks in the Table Office situated outside the Chamber.

The Serjeant at Arms, or one of the deputy, or associate, serjeants, sits in the Chamber during proceedings to respond to any unusual occurrences in or around the Chamber or the galleries that might affect the progress of business. The Serjeant is also occasionally asked by the Speaker to investigate delays in the conduct of divisions. The Serjeant also maintains an informal record of speakers and timings for the information of Members. Doorkeepers at either main entrance to the Chamber may also have information on the progress of business and will pass on queries from the Hansard reporters to those who have just spoken in debate (see *Hansard*).

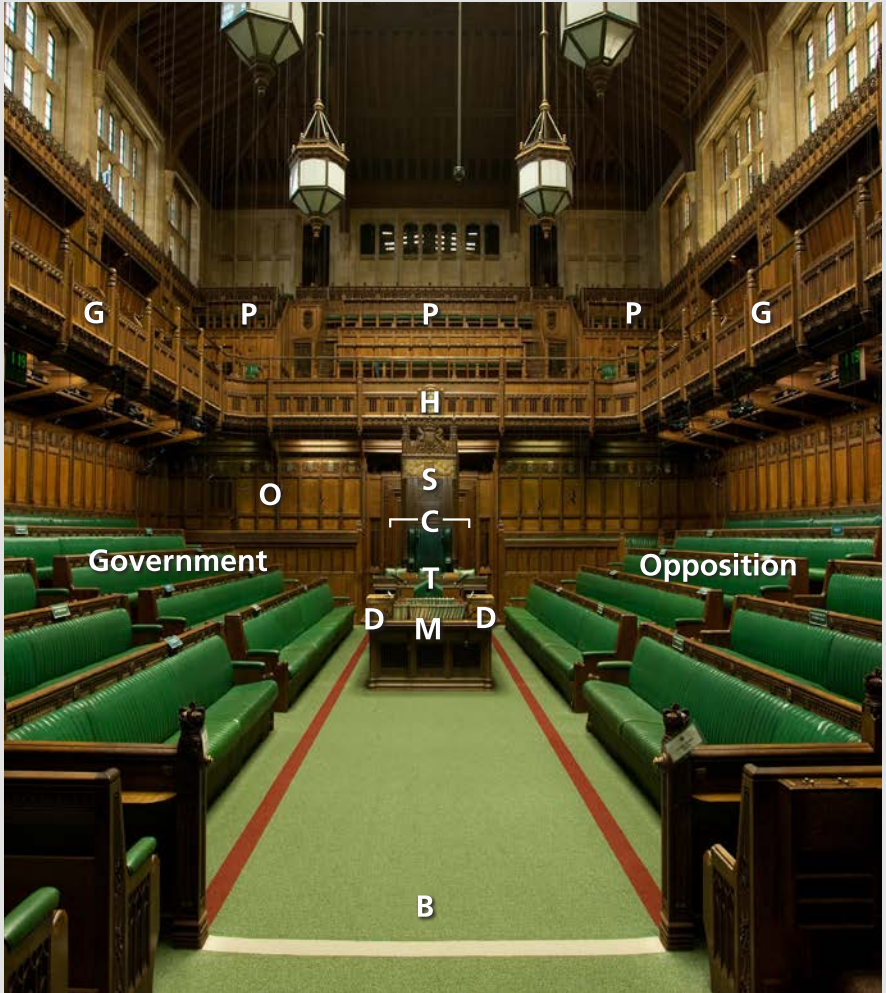
Conduct

For conduct in the Chamber, see the guidance on *Rules of behaviour and courtesies in the House* and the *Quick Guide*:

www.parliament.uk/business/news/2016/january/rules-of-behaviour-and-courtesies-in-the-house

For conduct in debate, see *Debates* and *rules of debate*.

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303.



- S The Speaker
- P Press Galleries
- H Hansard reporters
- O Government Officials Box
(advisers to Ministers)
- C Clerks at the Table

- T Table of the House
- D Despatch Boxes
- M Mace
- B Bar of the House
- G Members' Galleries

Closure

Most debates end at a set time or after a fixed period. Open-ended debates can be brought to a decision by a motion called 'the closure'. This procedural device is most commonly used on Opposition days and private Members' bill Fridays.

The closure is the question 'That the question be now put' – a proposal that, although there are still Members speaking or wishing to speak, the debate should be ended and the House proceed immediately to a decision.

Any Member can move the closure by standing and saying 'I beg to move that the question be now put' (if necessary, interrupting the Member speaking). Members are advised to consult the Chair first. The Speaker has discretion on whether to accept the closure motion, and may decide that the matter under debate has not been adequately debated even to offer the House the choice of whether to conclude or not. If the Speaker allows it, the question on the closure itself is put immediately, without debate.

If opposed, the question on the closure requires not just a majority but also at least 100 Members voting in favour; otherwise the original debate is resumed. If the closure is agreed to, the question that was being debated is then put immediately.

There is a similar procedure for moving 'That the question be now proposed', when the mover of a motion or amendment in relation to a bill has not finished his or her speech (the 'Golding' closure). The effect of this motion is to open the debate on the question to other Members.

Closure motions may also be moved in general committees, including public bill committees.

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303.

Committees – joint

Joint committees have members from both Houses sitting as a single committee under one Chair. Those provided for in standing orders include:

- Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments
- Joint Committee on Consolidation, &c., Bills
- Joint Committee on Human Rights
- Joint Committee on Tax Law Rewrite
- Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy

Ad hoc joint committees can also be appointed by each House to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny of a particular draft bill or to consider other matters.

Contact: the Commons Clerk of the relevant committee.

Committees – select

Departmental select committees

There is, broadly, one Commons select committee per Government department. Their role is to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the relevant department and its associated public bodies (agencies, regulators and quangos). Departmental committees have between 11 and 14 members.

Select committees determine their own subjects for inquiry within their remit, taking account of the core tasks set for them by the Liaison Committee of all chairs (see below). They also decide how to conduct their inquiries, usually by gathering written and oral evidence (and often information from visits around the UK and overseas).

Departmental committees make reports to the House which are published and made available via the parliamentary website. The Government is normally expected to reply to reports within two months.

Other select committees include:

Cross-cutting

- the Committee of Public Accounts, which considers reports from the National Audit Office on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of Government spending
- select committees on statutory instruments, regulatory reform, and European scrutiny
- the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which scrutinises the work of the ombudsmen and matters relating to the Civil Service and operation of the business of Government
- the Environmental Audit Committee, which considers the extent to which the policies and programmes of Government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development and which audits performance against Government environmental targets

Joint, with the Lords

- Joint Committee on Human Rights, which considers human rights issues in the United Kingdom as well as human rights implications of bills.

Ad hoc

- From time to time there are also time-limited ad hoc committees and joint committees set up to consider specific items of draft legislation, bills or other matters.

Inward-facing

- the Backbench Business Committee, which allocates time to backbenchers to lead debates on topics they regard as a priority (see *Backbench Business Committee*)
- the Petitions Committee, which considers and may pursue matters raised by e-petitions, including allocating time for debate

- the Committee on Standards, which considers reports from the Commissioner for Standards on complaints against Members
- the Administration Committee, which considers the services provided by the House for Members and others
- the Finance Committee, which considers expenditure on the House of Commons
- the Procedure Committee, which considers the House's procedures and practices, and
- the Privileges Committee, which considers matters of parliamentary privilege, including alleged breaches, referred to it.

General

Each committee has its own web pages as part of the Parliament website. These pages include all the published work of the committee, including reports, transcripts of oral evidence sessions and written submissions, as well as information about future programmes, meetings and membership.

Chairs

The proportion of chairs which each party has broadly reflects the composition of the House. The party which is to hold the chair of each departmental select committee and of other committees is agreed by the House following discussions between parties. These Chairs are then elected by secret ballot by all Members.

Membership

Nominations for the membership of select committees are generally put to the House by the Committee of Selection. The names considered by the Committee of Selection arise from secret ballots, the arrangements for which are the responsibilities of each political party. Members are nominated for the duration of a Parliament. The party composition of select committees reflects that of the House.

Meetings

Committees normally meet in one of the committee rooms in Westminster, either in the Palace itself (on the main or upper Committee corridors) or in Portcullis House. Most can also meet away from Westminster. There is no fixed time for committee meetings but

many select committees agree to meet at regular times each sitting week. Oral evidence (the committee questioning Ministers, experts, interest groups or individuals) will almost always take place in public and an uncorrected transcript is placed on the committee's web pages and in the Vote Office within a few days.

Most written evidence is also published. Some public meetings are broadcast, and nearly all are webcast (see www.parliamentlive.tv).

Informal discussions and the consideration of draft reports are invariably conducted in private. In both public and private meetings Members refer to each other by name and proceedings in select committee are far less formal than in the Chamber or in general committees.

Powers and privilege

The powers of each select committee are determined by the particular standing order under which they are set up. Most select committees have power to send for (require the attendance or submission of) persons, papers and records. Parliamentary privilege applies to anything said by Members and witnesses during the formal proceedings of a committee, but does not apply to informal occasions such as exchanges at a committee press conference on a report.

Quorum

The quorum of a select committee is three, or a quarter of its members, whichever is the greater, unless standing orders provide otherwise for a particular committee. Fractions are rounded up.

Staff

Each committee is supported by a team of permanent staff headed by the Committee Clerk. The staff make all the administrative arrangements, prepare briefing and (under guidance of the Chair) compile draft reports. Most committees have the power to appoint specialist advisers. Each committee is also supported by a media officer.

Liaison Committee

The Liaison Committee, which comprises select committee Chairs, considers and provides advice on general matters relating to the work of select committees. The committee has recommended, and the House has approved, a set of 'core tasks' for departmental

committees to guide their approach to the scrutiny of Government. The list of core tasks is set out on the committee's webpages. The Liaison Committee also allocates funds for overseas visits by select committees, within a budget set by the House of Commons Commission, and chooses reports to be debated in the House and in Westminster Hall. It also takes evidence from the Prime Minister three times a year.

Reports

Select committees will usually consider, agree and publish a report at the end of any inquiry. This report normally summarises the evidence gathered and arguments heard, sets out the committee's conclusions and makes recommendations for action aimed at the Government and other public bodies.

Members of the committee have the opportunity to consider any report as a draft, paragraph by paragraph, and propose and debate amendments to the text. Practice varies, but most committees initially hold informal discussions on any changes, followed by formal consideration which is minuted in detail. These proceedings take place in private. The formal minutes are then published.

Minority views

Select committees do not produce minority reports, but there may be an alternative draft report, which, if voted down, is printed as part of the committee's minutes. An alternative draft report should be prepared before the meeting at which the Chair's draft report is to be considered, and be put forward as an alternative to it. The committee's minutes relating to proceedings on a report will also set out amendments proposed formally, but not agreed to, as well as any divisions that took place in the process of agreeing a report.

Government replies

The Government has undertaken to reply to select committee reports within two months, except when committees agree a longer period.

Debates in the House

Committees may put forward their reports for a debate. The Liaison Committee and Blackbench Business Committee can both allocate time for such debates.

Contact: The clerk of the relevant committee (general inquiries, x1366).

Further information: Guide for Select Committees
(available from the Committee Office, x1366).

Committee of Selection

The Committee of Selection appoints Members to general committees, including public bill committees and delegated legislation committees as well as committees relating to private business. The Committee also puts motions to the House for the appointment of Members to most select committees and subsequent changes to membership. Separate arrangements are made for the Chairs of departmental select committees and certain other committees.

The Committee of Selection consists of nine members, amongst whom the whips of the political parties are usually represented.

The Committee normally meets on Wednesday afternoons; emails are sent to Members on Wednesday evenings and nominations not requiring the House's approval are listed in the Votes and Proceedings distributed in Thursday's Vote Bundle (although there may be subsequent changes).

In practice the Committee is responsible for applying the rules and conventions of the House to lists of names proposed by the political parties – principally, that, in appointing or nominating members of committees, the Committee of Selection must have regard to the party political composition of the House which will usually have the effect of granting the Government a majority.

Each political party makes its own arrangements for putting forward Members' names to the Committee of Selection for nomination to committees.

Contact: For inquiries about the current membership of committees, Committee Office, x1366; for other matters relating to selection, Clerk of the Committee of Selection, x3254.

Committee of the whole House

The Committee of the whole House is the entire House sitting as a committee in the Chamber. It is presided over by the Chairman of Ways and Means or one of the Deputies or a member of the Panel of Chairs. The Chairman sits in the Clerk of the House's seat at the Table and the Mace is placed on the brackets under the Table instead of upon it.

The Committee stage of Bills of major constitutional importance and very urgent bills usually takes place in Committee of the whole House.

As in other committees, any Member may speak more than once to the same question. The Chairman or his deputy is addressed by name (as in a general committee).

The Chairman's provisional selection of amendments is placed in the No Lobby, the Table Office, the Vote Office, the Library, and the intranet in the same way as the Speaker's selection of amendments for the report stage of a bill.

Contact: Clerk of Legislation, x3255, Secretary to the Chairman of Ways and Means, x3771.

Debates and rules of debate

General

A typical debate takes the following form:

- a Member proposes a motion
- the motion is debated
- an amendment may be put forward by another Member
- the House comes to a decision (if necessary by means of a division) on the amendment, first, and then on the motion (as amended, or not)

Debate ends when no-one else wishes to speak, the closure is moved (see *Closure*) or the time available expires; in the latter case the debate is adjourned unless standing orders, or a previously agreed specific order, require that the question be then put. There is no seconding of motions (except for the address replying to the Queen's Speech).

Courtesies

Members speaking should address their remarks to the Chair. They should refer to other Members not as 'you' ('you' can refer only to the occupant of the Chair) but as 'the honourable Member for [constituency]'. To avoid having to refer to the constituency, Members can be described as 'my honourable friend' or 'the honourable Member opposite'. Privy Counsellors are 'right honourable'. Ministers can be referred to by their office, as 'the Secretary of State' or 'the Minister'. The Speaker and Deputy Speakers are referred to as 'Mr [or Madam] Speaker' and 'Mr [or Madam] Deputy Speaker'. Members wishing to speak in a debate should normally give their names in advance to the Speaker's Office, preferably indicating the reason they wish to speak and any special factors that might be taken into consideration (such as a particularly relevant constituency case or interest).

Members may intervene briefly in each other's speeches, but only if the Member who has the floor chooses to give way. Interventions should be short and relevant.

Time limits

After taking into account the length of a debate and the number of Members who wish to speak, the Speaker may set a time limit on backbench speeches (normally of between 3 and 10 minutes). In these circumstances, for each of the first two interventions a Member accepts (if any), an extra minute is allowed, plus the time taken by the intervention. The Speaker may also vary the time limit during debate if it transpires that greater or lesser pressure exists on the time available. The digital clocks on each side of the Chamber show how much time a Member has left, and the colons on the clocks begin to flash one minute before the expiry of the time allowed. They also flash one minute before the expiry of the time available for a particular debate.

Rules of debate

Members may not: accuse other Members of deliberate misrepresentation, or lying, to the House; use abusive or insulting language likely to create disorder; criticise the personal conduct of individual Members or Peers (other than on a substantive motion to that effect); refer to the alleged views of members of the Royal Family; or refer to matters awaiting adjudication by a court of law (except when discussing legislation).

When the Speaker rises to speak, all other Members, including the Member who has the floor, must resume their seats immediately. The Speaker may order a Member who persists in irrelevance or tedious repetition to discontinue his or her speech, and in cases of grossly disorderly conduct may direct a Member to withdraw for the rest of the sitting. The Speaker may also direct Members who breach the terms of the sub judice resolution to resume their seat. This Resolution seeks to deter Members from commenting on matters that are subject to active legal proceedings.

The Speaker has power to ‘name’ a Member for disregarding the authority of the Chair or other abusive conduct, upon which a motion is made suspending the Member from the service of the House (for five sitting days in the case of a first offence in a session). The Serjeant at Arms is responsible for enforcing the terms of such a motion.

Guidance on the *Rules of behaviour and courtesies in the House* is issued by the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers. See:

www.parliament.uk/business/news/2016/january/rules-of-behaviour-and-courtesies-in-the-house

Contact: The Speaker’s Office x5300 (notice of a wish to take part in a debate); Table Office x3002 (procedure).

Debate – emergency

Members may seek the Speaker’s leave on Mondays to Thursdays to apply for a debate on ‘a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration’. If leave is given, a speech of not more than three minutes may be made after question time and statements; the Speaker then decides whether to submit the application to the House.

If the application is submitted, and the House grants leave, a general debate of a length decided by the Speaker (but no more than three hours) will take place on a future day, most likely the next sitting day, on a motion ‘That the House has considered the matter of ...’.

Requests should be made to the Speaker’s Office by 11.30am on Mondays, 10.00am on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and 8.15am on Thursdays, or as soon as practicable after the urgency becomes known, declaring any relevant interests. Members are informed by the Speaker’s Office if the Speaker is willing to hear the application.

Contact: The Speaker's Office, x5301, x5300 (applications); Table Office, x3302, x3303 (procedure).

Debates – general

General debates are held on a motion, 'That this House has considered the matter of [topic].' They are used, along with adjournment debates, for debate on issues of general interest where no specific decision of the House is sought. When the subject matter of a general debate is expressed in neutral terms no amendments to the motion may be tabled. Such a motion may be voted on at the end of the debate (in circumstances where sufficient Members wish to register concern about the topic and/or how it is being tackled).

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303 (procedure). The Clerk of the Backbench Committee (suggested subjects).

Divisions

General

When the Speaker 'puts the question', at the end of a debate or when required by an order or standing order, he says "The Question is [either the substantive text or 'as on the order/ amendment paper']. As many as are of that opinion say 'aye' ... of the contrary 'no' ... " – Members shout 'Aye' or 'No' as they wish – and the Speaker says "I think the Ayes [or Noes] have it". If this judgement is challenged by further shouts of 'No' [or 'Aye'], the Speaker calls a division, saying "Clear the lobby".

- The division bells are activated and the annunciators will display an animated green bell.
- The exit doors from the lobbies are locked by the doorkeepers.
- Four tellers are appointed to count the votes (one from each side of the question for each lobby).
- When looking from the Speaker's Chair, the Aye Lobby is to the right, and the No Lobby is to the left.
- The division lobbies operate on a practical 'traffic management' principle with the entrances and exits at opposite ends so the movement through the Aye Lobby is north-to-south, and in the No Lobby, it is south-to-north.

- Members wishing to vote should enter the division lobbies using the entrances behind the Speaker's Chair (Aye Lobby), beyond the Bar of the House (No Lobby), or the doors from each side of the Chamber.

Two minutes after first putting the question, the Speaker puts the question again. If the Speaker's judgement on the outcome is not challenged (or if there are not enough tellers), the division is called off.

Otherwise the Speaker announces the names of the tellers. Once they are in place, the exit doors from the lobbies are opened and Members begin to pass out of the lobbies.

Three clerks in each lobby record the names of those voting (responsible for surnames from A-G, H-M and N-Z respectively). Members should give their name clearly to the clerk even if they believe that the clerk knows who they are.

The two tellers in each lobby record the numbers of those voting. Members should pause and nod in the doorway to allow the tellers to record their vote (the tellers count aloud as Members exit).

Eight minutes after the question was first put, the Speaker orders that the *entrances* to the division lobbies be locked. The doorkeepers are responsible for doing this swiftly and firmly under the Speaker's authority as soon as the instruction has been given.

A Member who votes in the wrong lobby by accident cannot undo that vote, but can cancel its effect by crossing to the other lobby and voting on the other side, if time allows.

There is no formal way of recording a deliberate abstention.

Divisions are concluded by the declaration, usually by a whip, of "All out" to the tellers in each lobby, signifying that there is no Member left to vote. The tellers then report the results to the clerk at the Table. When the tellers from both lobbies have reported the results, they announce the result to the House. In circumstances of a delay in achieving the 'all out' in either lobby, the Speaker may order the Serjeant at Arms to investigate.

The numbers reported to the Table by the tellers constitute the result of the division. The lists of names reported in Hansard of those voting

constitute the official voting record of Members. Any corrections should be given to the Clerk of Divisions in the Public Bill Office, by phone or letter, as soon as possible.

Deferred divisions

For certain types of business, after 10pm on Monday, 7pm on Tuesday and Wednesday and 5pm on Thursday, any prospective division is deferred until the following Wednesday when it takes place by means of Members handing in a ballot paper. In such cases, the questions to be decided are listed on a pink ballot paper distributed with Wednesday's Vote Bundle, and Members may vote in the No Lobby at any time between 12.30 and 2pm (with extra time if such voting is interrupted by ordinary divisions). Members may not hand in a ballot paper for another Member. The result is later announced in the House from the Chair at some convenient moment.

Some types of business are not covered by these arrangements, including proceedings on bills. In addition, a Minister may move a motion that the arrangements for deferred divisions shall not apply to specified motions. Deferred divisions are most common on motions to approve statutory instruments and EU documents.

Contact: Clerk of Divisions, Public Bill Office, x4921.

Early day motions (EDMs)

General

Early Day Motions (EDMs) are motions tabled by Members, formally for debate 'on an early day', but which are only in very rare instances debated. They allow Members to express an opinion on or draw attention to a very wide range of subjects, and give other Members a chance to show their support by signing the motion.

Notices of motions disapproving of statutory instruments and other delegated legislation (known as 'prayers') also appear in the list of EDMs (see *Statutory Instruments*).

Main rules

- Not more than 250 words expressed in a single sentence.
- No criticism of other Members, Peers, judges or members of the royal family except as the main subject of the motion (and under the title “Conduct of ...”).
- No reference to matters which are sub judice (see *Debate and rules of debate*).
- No unparliamentary language and no irony.
- Titles must be expressed in neutral terms and be purely descriptive (no slogans).
- No advertising and no campaigns (multiple EDMs with minor variations on a single subject).

A freedom enjoyed by EDMs, compared to the restrictions on questions and adjournment debates, is that they do not need to be confined to matters for which Ministers are responsible.

Amendments

Proposed amendments to EDMs must be within the scope of the original motion and not increase its length beyond the 250-word limit (see *Amendments*). Names of Members signing an amendment are automatically withdrawn from the main motion (if necessary). The Member in charge of an EDM cannot table an amendment to his or her own motion (but can suggest a correction in certain limited circumstances).

Tabling

EDMs should be handed in or sent to the Table Office and (unless handed in by a Member) must bear the signature of at least one Member.

Names can be added to EDMs by a Member signing and sending, or bringing to the Table Office, a copy of the motion, or a signed note of the numbers of the relevant motions. The Member in charge of the EDM determines the first six names and their order.

A list of names to be added must be signed by the Member submitting it. In order to ensure authenticity, names cannot be added by phone, fax or email. Names added to existing motions received

by the Table Office when the House is still sitting after 10.30pm on Mondays, 7.30pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 5.30pm on Thursdays and 3pm on sitting Fridays (and at any time on a non-sitting Friday) are deemed to have been added on the following sitting day.

Relevant interests must be declared, even if only adding a name to an existing motion.

Withdrawal

The Member in charge of an EDM (the first signatory) may withdraw it, even if other Members have signed it. Members may also withdraw their individual name.

Online publication

Access to all tabled EDMs is provided online. The title, number, full text, and supporters' names and party affiliations, for each motion and each amendment, are available. The database can also show which EDMs a particular Member has signed and on what date. Information can also be requested from the Table Office clerks.

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303, Procedural Hub x7333.

European Union business

General

The House's main roles are to influence and call to account UK Ministers in respect of their activities in the EU, to monitor the work of EU institutions which may affect the UK and to influence the form of any UK legislation needed to implement EU legislation.

EU legislation may take the form of regulations (binding in their entirety and directly applicable in member states), directives (binding as regards their results, but each member state determines the method and form of implementation) or decisions (binding on those to whom they are addressed, such as governments or companies). Regulations may need to be supplemented by UK legislation for full implementation, and directives require UK legislation (whether by Act or statutory instrument) for their implementation.

The House must also deal with many non-legislative EU documents, for example Commission green and white papers, communications to the Council of Ministers, draft Council recommendations and reports from the Court of Auditors.

The House has the usual opportunities to influence Ministers (questions, ministerial statements, adjournment debates, select committee inquiries) but also more specific arrangements.

Relevant committees

European Scrutiny Committee

The European Scrutiny Committee is a select committee which examines EU documents and reports its opinion on the legal and political importance of each. It publishes a weekly report with detailed discussion of documents it considers important, incorporating information and views obtained from the Government and elsewhere. It determines which documents are debated (usually in a European Committee, but occasionally on the floor of the House). In addition, the Committee may take oral evidence on particular documents or meetings of the Council of Ministers.

European Committees

The European Committees are general committees appointed as required to consider European documents referred by the European Scrutiny Committee. European Committees meet at times determined by the Government and announced in the general committee notices in the order paper.

Such committees are chaired by a member of the Panel of Chairs and, where practicable, their membership includes at least two members of the European Scrutiny Committee and two members of the relevant departmental select committee.

European Committee meetings

The procedure at European Committee meetings is:

- first, a member of the European Scrutiny Committee makes a brief statement explaining that committee's decision to refer the document(s) to a European Committee
- next the Minister (or Ministers) makes a short statement and then answers questions (for up to one hour or, if the Chair sees fit, for 1½ hours)
- next a Government motion is debated (to which amendments may be proposed)
- after up to 2½ hours the question is put.

Members not nominated to the committee may attend and speak and move amendments (but not vote). Subsequently a motion (not necessarily the one agreed by the committee) is moved in the House, and may be amended, but there is no further opportunity for debate.

Other scrutiny

- Debates on the floor of the House on particular European documents; usually limited to 1½ hours.
- General debates on EU matters on the floor of the House; usually twice-yearly before meetings of heads of State or Government in the European Council.
- Written ministerial statements before and after each Council of Ministers meeting.

The ‘scrutiny reserve resolution’, passed by the House in 1998, although not formally binding, constrains UK Ministers from agreeing to EU decisions in advance of proposals being cleared by the European Scrutiny Committee or any debate it recommends taking place, though with exceptions (if the proposals are confidential, routine or trivial).

A list of EU documents recommended for debate is in the Vote Bundle every Monday, and is on wall-sheets placed around the Palace.

The European Order of Business paper sets out the details of EU documents and motions to be considered in European committees.

Contact: Clerk of the European Scrutiny Committee, x5467; for information about European committees, Public Bill Office, x3251, x6758.

Further information: Guide to the European scrutiny system of the House available from the European Scrutiny Committee and the Scrutiny Reserve resolution of 17 November 1998 is set out as an appendix to the published Standing Orders.

English Votes for English Laws (EVEL)

“English Votes for English Laws” (EVEL) is the commonly-used term for changes made to Standing Orders in 2015 which provide for distinct proceedings, including voting, on provisions on Government

bills, and some motions relating to secondary legislation and Lords Amendments to Bills.

EVEL involves two tests, both of which must be met. The first test is that a legislative provision, statutory instrument or motion relates exclusively to England, or, as the case may be, England and Wales. The second test is that it is “within devolved legislative competence”, in other words, that the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales or the Northern Ireland Assembly could legislate on the same matter.

In the case of Government bills, the Speaker decides, prior to second reading, which clauses and schedules within each bill meet the two tests for certification. After second reading, committee and report stage, the Speaker considers the bill again for certification, either for the same reasons as before, or where a previously certified provision has been omitted. Where a bill is certified at this second point, it is subject to a further stage (Legislative Grand Committee) immediately after report stage and before third reading.

The Legislative Grand Committee is a form of Committee of the whole House, and takes place in the Chamber. It considers a consent motion moved by a Minister, which almost invariably proposes agreement to the certified provisions. In Legislative Grand Committees, all Members of the House may participate in the debate, but only Members for constituencies in England or, as the case may be, England and Wales may participate in any division. In the event that the relevant Legislative Grand Committee did not consent to all the certified provisions, there could be further stages in the House and in Legislative Grand Committee.

When the House is considering Lords amendments to a Bill, the Speaker applies the same two tests to motions relating to the Lords amendments (i.e., motions to agree to/disagree with the amendment or to amend it) and certifies those which meet both tests. Where there is a division on such a motion, this requires a ‘double majority’. In this case a single division takes place in the usual way, but the result is announced for all participating Members and separately for Members representing constituencies in England or, as the case may be, England and Wales. Both groups must vote Aye for the motion to be passed.

The arrangements described above for Government Bills apply to the Finance Bill as to other Government Bills and also to the Budget resolutions, except that, where a tax measure could be introduced in the same form for Scotland by the Scottish Parliament (such as rates of income tax or changes to the landfill tax), the requirements for consent and for double majorities apply with all Members for constituencies in Northern Ireland in the same category as those in England and Wales.

Statutory Instruments that are subject to a motion in the House (usually an approval motion or a motion to annul (known as a 'prayer')) are also subject to the Speaker's certification as set out above. A few types of instrument are automatically proceeded with as if certified. In any such case, if a motion is divided on, it is subject to a 'double majority' vote, with the same requirement for a majority in both totals to be agreed in the affirmative.

EVEL does not apply to private Members' Bills.

Contacts: Clerk of Bills, Public Bill Office x3257; Clerk of Legislation, Public Bill Office, x3255

Financial procedure

The *Budget statement* includes a summary of the main tax and spending proposals, and is usually followed by four days of debate, ending with votes on tax resolutions. Tax changes, but not new taxes, may come into effect immediately and be validated by a single motion taken after the Budget speech; they need to be confirmed by individual resolutions within 10 sitting days. Papers published at the time of the Budget include the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" (the 'red book').

The *Finance Bill* is brought in to give permanent effect to the resolutions, which are time-limited, along with other tax changes. Procedure is as for any public bill, but the bill is usually split for committee stage: a selection of the more controversial, important or novel clauses is considered in Committee of the whole House; the remainder of the bill is considered in public bill committee. Proceedings on the Finance Bill on the floor of the House are 'exempted business', and so may continue until any hour. The Finance Bill is not amended by the House of Lords.

Government departments publish expenditure plans for the ensuing three years, forming part of each department's annual reporting cycle of spending and performance.

The *main Supply estimates* are published for each department, usually in May, and usually voted on in June or early July. There are also supplementary estimates, a 'vote on account' to authorise a provisional allocation of funds for the forthcoming financial year, and 'excess votes' to authorise spending above agreed limits, all published in February and voted on in March. All public spending must be approved by Parliament and the questions on estimates are put formally, without debate (see *Estimates days* below).

Appropriation bills give legislative force to the estimates and vote on account. There are usually two such bills each year. Questions on these bills are put without debate.

Money and ways and means resolutions are passed to give explicit approval to new types of expenditure or taxation or other charges in bills before the House. Such motions are usually debated with the second reading of the bill (but may be voted on separately). If considered separately from the second reading of the bill to which they relate, debate may last up to 45 minutes.

Estimates days. Three sitting days (Estimates days) are set aside each year formally for debate and approval of the content of the estimates presented by the Government to Parliament for approval. The subject for debate is chosen by the Liaison Committee, and is usually based on select committee reports.

Money is voted only on the initiative of the Government. Thus the Commons could reduce estimates but not increase them. Most of the estimates are agreed to without amendment or debate. Financial scrutiny includes:

- the departmental select committees' monitoring of the expenditure of each department; their examination of departments' annual reports; and the highlighting of individual estimates for debate on the floor of the House on Estimates days
- reports from the Treasury Committee on each Budget
- reports from the Committee of Public Accounts on the value for money obtained by Government expenditure (based on studies undertaken by the National Audit Office)

Contact: Clerk of Supply, Public Bill Office, x4921; Clerk of the Public Accounts Committee, x3273.

Hansard (Official Report)

General

Hansard (formally known as the Official Report) is a substantially verbatim report of what was said in the House and its general committees. It is edited, consistent with a house style, to remove repetitions and redundancies, and to correct mistakes obvious to those present while leaving out nothing that adds to the meaning of the speech or the flavour of the argument. The proceedings are published in the daily part issued on the following morning, which also contains Westminster Hall proceedings, petitions and written ministerial corrections. In advance of printing, speeches made in the main Chamber are made publicly available on the Parliamentary website three hours after delivery (four hours in the case of Westminster Hall). Hansard also operates the annunciator system.

Production

After speaking, Members will be asked for their notes and may also receive queries about names, figures or quotations, via the doorkeepers, and it is helpful if these are answered speedily. Members may check the transcripts of their speeches before they are printed. To do so they should go to the Assistant Editors room (one floor up

from the principal floor by the Ladies' Gallery stairs near the back of the Speaker's Chair) between 1½ and 2½ hours after sitting down (or up to one hour after the House rises if this is earlier). There is also a facility for emailing main speeches to Members for checking (contact Hansard for details of this service or see Hansard's *'A guide for Members'*).

Suggested corrections to the daily parts for publication in the bound volumes can be sent in writing to the Assistant Editors room. In neither case can substantial alterations be made to the meaning of what was said in the House. Separate daily reports are produced of debates in general committees, including public bill committees, delegated legislation committees, European committees and grand committees. To check the transcripts of their speeches in committee, Members should make arrangements, before or after the sitting, with the Hansard Committee Sub-Editor, who sits at the end of the platform to the Chair's left. Hansard also reports some select committee evidence sessions.

Format

A typical edition (daily part) of Hansard for a sitting of the House can include the following (each with its own set of running column references):

- all proceedings in the Chamber (numbered columns) (items disposed of without debate are listed at the point they were agreed)
- all proceedings in Westminster Hall ('WH' columns)
- petitions presented informally and any ministerial observations on petitions ('P' columns)
- written ministerial statements ('WS' columns)
- Ministerial corrections ('MC' columns)

Contact: Editor, x3388; Deputy Editor, x5291; Managing Editors (House), x2350, x5257; MEs Committees x5762, x6846 and Sub-Editors (Westminster Hall), x5522.

Ministerial statements

Oral

Ministers may make oral statements to the House after question time and urgent questions on Monday-Thursday, or at 11am on a sitting Friday. These are often either responses to significant events or reporting back following high-level meetings of international bodies. Statements are followed by questions, usually first from the Official Opposition front bench, then others.

The full text of the statement is distributed in the Chamber by the doorkeepers once the Minister has sat down.

By agreement with the Speaker, ministerial statements may be made at other times (for example if the urgency of the matter was not known at the usual time for statements). Such statements would usually be made between items of business or immediately before the end of day adjournment debate.

Written

Notices of written ministerial statements are listed in the order paper. Printed copies of the statements become available in the Library and the Vote Office, usually from 9.30am, and online within the Q&A database. Written ministerial statements are published the next day in Hansard (with column numbers in a separate 'WS' series).

Contact: Table Office, x3303, x7333 (procedure); Library, x3666 and Vote Office, x3631 (distribution).

Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh business

Arrangements specific to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales include oral questions to the relevant Secretaries of State, the work of the appropriate select committees and provisions relating to the Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh Grand Committees.

Select committees

These are:

- Northern Ireland Affairs Committee
- Scottish Affairs Committee
- Welsh Affairs Committee

They are charged by the House with the examination of the expenditure, administration and policy of the Northern Ireland Office, Scotland Office and the Wales Office, respectively.

Grand Committees

Members for Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland constituencies are automatically members of their respective grand committees. Other Members may also be nominated to them.

Meetings of these committees have become less frequent and the range of business undertaken more limited, since the devolution of powers and responsibilities to the National Assembly for Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament.

The types of business formally provided vary between committees but variously include: question time, ministerial statements, motions on delegated legislation and adjournment and general debates.

Grand committee sittings, and the business to be conducted, are determined by motions moved by the Government and agreed by the House. An order paper is produced and distributed for each meeting.

Recently, meetings of the Northern Ireland, and Scottish, grand committees have been rare.

Contact: Clerk of Grand Committees x3253, and the individual select committee clerks, x1366.

Opposition days

On 20 days each session (sometimes divided into half-days), opposition parties choose the business to be discussed. Seventeen of these days are allocated to the Leader of the Official Opposition. Three days are at the disposal of the leader of the second largest opposition party who, by convention, from time to time makes a day or part-day available to the other smaller opposition parties. Alternatively the Government may make an entire day available to such parties.

Business taken on such days usually takes the form of debate arising on a motion, or split between two motions, tabled by the opposition party whose day it is. However, divisions on motions relating to negative statutory instruments (already debated in committee) have also on occasion been selected alongside such debates.

In order to allow a division on the substance of the opposition motion, the normal order of proceedings (dealing with amendments before the main question) is reversed under standing orders. Depending on the exact form of the amendment and whether it has been tabled by the Government, the question taken first is usually 'That the original words stand part of the question' and, if that question is negatived the House then decides straightaway whether 'the proposed words [i.e. of any Government amendment] be there added' and, usually, the final question, on the motion (as amended), can then be declared to be agreed without a further division.

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303.

Order paper and other business papers

Order paper

The order paper (formally entitled 'Order of Business') is the House's agenda for a sitting and lists all the House's business for a particular day, including committee sittings, as well as future business in as much detail as is available. The first section is the summary agenda for the day which indicates those items where debate is expected to arise in the Chamber (in **bold** type) and the debates scheduled in Westminster Hall. The main order paper then follows, split into two parts.

Part 1: Business today

Business today sets out details of: questions for oral answer; oral ministerial statements (if any notice has been given); preliminary business (if any); main business; public petitions to be presented (if any); the end of day adjournment debate; the detail of debates in Westminster Hall; written ministerial statements being made; committee meetings; committee reports being published; and any announcements (for example, the effect of forthcoming recesses on tabling deadlines for PQs and amendments).

For each item of business, an indication is given of whether debate can take place; for how long; and whether provision has been made for putting the question (a potential division) at a specified time or without debate.

The order paper is compiled by the Table Office clerks each day for the next sitting of the House. The deadline for the submission of any changes to the order paper (tabling amendments or items for remaining orders) for the next issue is the rising of the House on the previous

sitting day (even when a recess intervenes). (Where Westminster Hall sits later than the main Chamber, changes to the next day's order paper may be made up to the rising of Westminster Hall.)

Part 2: Future business

Future business contains the 'Calendar of business' which sets out (provisional) notice of any items of business for which dates have been given; and 'Remaining orders and notices' which lists business not yet scheduled for a specific date.

Business papers

The order paper is a part of the daily Commons Business papers. Other main items include:

- Votes and proceedings (V&P), the formal minutes of the previous sitting day. An appendix to the V&P sets out papers presented or laid before the House (including statutory instruments).
- Notices of questions tabled on the previous sitting day (blue pages). Members can check their own questions for accuracy.
- Notices of Private business (for that day and future days) (blue pages).
- Early day motions (a) tabled on the previous sitting day, and (b) to which names have been added or amendments proposed (blue pages).
- (On Wednesdays if one or more deferred divisions are to take place) a ballot paper (pink page).

All this material is available from the Vote Office or online. It is an agreed strategic aim of the House to move from printing documents to publication online via the UK Parliament website:

- 'What's On' page, or
- 'Parliamentary Business' / 'Publications and records' / '*Commons business papers*'.

or via the Parliament intranet, *Online Members Centre*

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303, x7333 (content); Vote Office, x3631 (distribution).

Petitions (including e-petitions)

Public Petitions

The traditional petitions to the House, known as ‘public petitions’, are petitions with signatures collected on paper, seeking redress of grievance presented by a Member on behalf of one or more of their constituents. These petitions must be prepared in accordance with the House’s rules concerning form and content. The rules include abstaining from referring to cases being considered by courts, and using respectful language. Asking the advice of the Journal Office at an early stage may prevent problems later, and Members and their staff are encouraged to contact the Clerk of Public Petitions ([x3310](tel:x3310); publicpetitions@parliament.uk) with any queries.

Petition text	Explanation
To the House of Commons.	All petitions must be addressed to the House of Commons.
The petition of ...	Include a brief description of the petitioners here. This is usually something like “residents of Norwich”, but could also be “residents of the UK”.
Declares that...	Describe the problem or issue that the petition is about. The content should be clear to someone who is not familiar with the issue or the local area.
The petitioner(s) therefore request(s)/ urge(s) the House of Commons to...	State very clearly what the House of Commons is being asked to do about the issue. Petitions often ask the House of Commons to urge the Government to take some action. This section is called the ‘prayer’ and must be read out by the Member when the petition is presented in the Chamber.
And the petitioner(s) remain(s), etc.	This is a closing phrase to make clear that this is the end of the petition. There is no need to change it or add anything.

Clauses in the petition are separated with; *further that* and the final clause begins; *and further that*.

Only Members may present petitions to the House. Petitions must first be endorsed by the Journal Office as being in order, and the original petition must be signed by the Member at the top of the first page above the wording of the petition. Photocopies are not

accepted. If a Member wishes to present a petition from residents of another Member's constituency, it has been a convention for the Member presenting the petition to inform the other Member of their intentions. Generally, public petitions require two signatures to be presented in the House (although one signature is acceptable if the petition is on behalf of a single resident). Each signatory to a petition must provide their full name, address with postcode and hand-signed signature. Presentation may be formal or informal.

Informal presentation

Petitions can be presented at any time the House is sitting by dropping them in the green bag on the back of the Speaker's Chair.

Formal presentation

To present a public petition formally on the floor of the House, notice must be given in the Journal Office in person by the Member before the rising of the House on the day before the Member intends to present the petition. The time of presentation is immediately before the half-hour adjournment debate.

On being called, the Member may make a brief statement (not a speech) as to whom the petition is from, what it concerns and the number of signatures attached, and then read out the petitioners' 'prayer' (the sentence setting out what the petitioners are requesting). No other Member may speak.

At the end of the statement, the Member brings the public petition directly from his or her place to the Table, hands it to the Clerk who reads out the title, then takes it to the green bag behind the Speaker's Chair and drops it in (or hands it to a doorkeeper to do so).

Publication

The text of a public petition which has been formally presented is set out in full in Hansard immediately after the presenting Member's remarks (except where the Member has already read a short petition fully into the record). The text of petitions presented informally appears after the day's proceedings, before written ministerial statements.

Copies of the Hansard record of each petition's text are sent to the presenting Member and to the relevant Government Department.

The text of Ministers' observations on public petitions appears in its own section of Hansard after written ministerial statements. Copies of such observations (or notification that the relevant Minister will not be making any) are sent to the presenting Member. The Government has given an undertaking that substantive petitions should normally receive a response from the relevant Department.

E-petitions

Members of the public can create online petitions about the issues that matter to them, directly, via the e-petitions website, www.petitions.parliament.uk. Petitions will be published if they are in line with the website standards. These include a requirement that the petition should be about a matter which is within the responsibility of the UK Government or Parliament. The website standards are set out in full at petition.parliament.uk/help.

The Petitions Committee, which functions similarly to a regular select committee, is responsible for reviewing all e-petitions. E-petitions which receive over 10,000 signatures are considered by the Committee once the Government has responded to the issues raised by the petitioner, and e-petitions with over 100,000 signatures are considered by the Committee for a debate in Westminster Hall. The Committee may also choose to schedule debates on petitions with fewer than 100,000 signatures, if it deems the issue to be particularly important.

As well as scheduling debates on e-petitions, the Petitions Committee also has the power to call for written or oral evidence about a specific e-petition, and to seek further information from the Government on the subject of an e-petition. The Committee's staff support the Committee in its work by corresponding with petitioners about their e-petitions, co-ordinating public engagement activities with petitioners and signatories, and providing assistance and advice both to Members and the public.

Since July 2015, over 10 million people in the United Kingdom have signed an e-petition. E-petition debates are streamed live on parliament.live.tv, and full transcripts of e-petitions debates are made available by Hansard.

Relationship between a public petition and an e-petition

The two petition systems operate independently. It is not possible to combine, formally, the number of signatures of an e-petition and public (paper) petition, even if the two petitions discuss the same subject. However, a Member might choose to:

- refer to an e-petition within the text of a public (paper) petition;
- refer to an e-petition within their statement when presenting a public petition in the Chamber.

Please note that whilst e-petitions require 10,000 signatures to trigger a Government response, public (paper) petitions only require 2 signatures to be formally or informally presented by a Member. Public petitions will normally receive a Government response (observation) following presentation.

Contact: (1) Public Petitions - Clerk of Public Petitions, Journal Office, x3310 (content and notice of formal presentation), (2) E-Petitions – Clerk of the Petitions Committee, x3275.

Points of order

Points of order bring potential, alleged or supposed breaches of the House's rules of order to the Speaker's attention. A valid point of order must relate to matters which are within the responsibility of the Chair.

Members may seek to raise them at any time, but the Speaker has discretion as to when to hear them, and will not normally do so until question time and any statements are completed. When possible, it is helpful if notice of a point of order is given to the Speaker.

A Member with a point of order affecting a division currently in progress should go to the Chair and explain it, and the Chair can take any necessary action. If the Member still wishes to raise formally the point of order during the division, he or she should do so, standing, from the second bench as close to the Chair as possible.

Contact: The Speaker's Office, x5300; Table Office, x3302, x3303.

Private legislation

Private legislation, or bills, are promoted by organisations outside the House (such as local authorities or companies) to obtain powers for themselves in excess of, or in conflict with, the general law. They should not be confused with private Members' bills, which are a type of public bill brought before the House by a backbencher rather than a Minister.

In recent years there have only been a few private bills each session.

Petitions for bills (formal requests for the legislation) are normally presented not later than 27 November each year, and the bills themselves presented not later than 21 January. Private bills then go through broadly the same stages as public bills, except at committee stage.

Stages of private bills are initially set down on the order paper immediately after prayers on Monday to Thursday. They cannot be debated at this time and progress can be blocked by a single Member objecting. The initial objection must be made in person, by calling "Object" when the bill's title is read, but a 'blocking motion' can subsequently be tabled in the Private Bill Office and can be automatically renewed.

The tabling of a blocking motion may give rise to discussions between the signatories and the bill's promoter and lead to compromise – explanation or alteration of some part of the bill – and dropping of the objection. Bills persistently blocked are eventually set down for debate by the Chairman of Ways and Means, when proceedings may continue for up to three hours.

Organisations or individuals outside the House, whose interests are 'specially and directly affected' by a private bill, may oppose it by petitioning against it, though there are strict rules as to who may petition and when.

In such cases the bill is committed to an opposed bill committee, consisting of four Members (without personal or constituency interests in the bill) who sit in a quasi-judicial capacity, hearing the promoters of the bill and petitioners against it and their respective witnesses. The opposed bill committee decides whether to: (a) approve the bill as drafted, (b) insist on amendments, or (c) reject the bill.

If no petitions are deposited against a private bill, it is committed to the unopposed bills committee, where the scrutiny is not adversarial, although the promoters still need to 'prove' the case for their bill.

At the consideration stage, Members may table amendments, but there is no consideration stage if the bill has not been amended in committee. Private bills that have not been completed can be suspended (by motion) at the end of one session of Parliament and re-introduced at the same stage of proceedings in a later session. Alternatively, private bills which have not been suspended can be revived (by motion) in the new session of Parliament.

Notices relating to private business appear on the (blue) private business pages of the Vote Bundle. There are separate standing orders for private business. The full text of private bills and petitions and related proceedings are available on the Bills and Legislation pages of the Parliamentary website.

Contact: Private Bill Office, x6008.

Privilege

General

Parliamentary privilege confers protection on parliamentary proceedings from being questioned or impeached in any court or place outside Parliament.

The House exercises its powers in respect of privilege sparingly, and usually only when essential to prevent the House as a whole or its Members or staff from being obstructed in the performance of their responsibilities and functions, or in response to substantial interference in the work of a committee.

Privilege is a complex area and advice should be sought from the Clerk of the Journals as soon as possible after an issue of privilege appears to have arisen.

Principles

The main principles of parliamentary privilege are set out below.

Freedom of speech

Subject to the rules of order, Members may say whatever they see fit in debate, or select committee proceedings, free from the threat of legal action. Protection also extends to others who take part in parliamentary proceedings, such as select committee witnesses.

This protection has been extended by statute to the official reporting of proceedings in Parliament and to the publication of other papers on the express authority of the House.

However, Members' comments, or their own publication of a speech, unconnected to parliamentary proceedings, are not covered.

So, for example, select committee reports are covered by the protection of privilege but what Members say in a select committee press conference is not covered.

Similarly, the contents of a speech made in the House would not be covered by parliamentary privilege if the Member then published that speech in a press release, or by other means.

Members' correspondence is not normally covered by parliamentary privilege.

Freedom to control own proceedings

The House retains the right to be the sole judge of the conduct of its own proceedings and of the conduct of individual Members in connection with those proceedings. These matters may not be questioned by the courts or other bodies outside the House.

Power to punish breaches of privilege

The House has authority to proceed against those judged to have breached or abused parliamentary privilege or committed other contempts of the House such as: action or threats against Members or select committee witnesses on account of participation in a parliamentary proceeding; or the disclosure of the contents of a draft select committee report.

Offences against order in debate in the Chamber may also amount to breaches or abuses of privilege, but it is far more common for the Speaker to deal with such matters as soon as they have occurred, under powers granted by standing orders.

Raising a matter of privilege

Any complaint of a breach of privilege should be made to the Speaker in writing as soon as reasonably practicable. The Speaker will then decide whether the Member is called in the House to move that the matter be referred to the Committee of Privileges or that some other action be taken.

Contact: Clerk of the Journals, x3315.

Questions – oral, topical and written

Oral

Departments answer questions at regular intervals according to a rota (set by the Government) which is available from the Vote Office and Online Members' Centre. Each Member may table one substantive oral question for each Government department answering. In addition, Members may table one topical oral question to each department which answers such questions (see below).

Oral questions may be tabled on any sitting day (or non-sitting Friday) from immediately after the question time for a particular department until three days (excluding Fridays and weekends) before the next question time for that department. On the last day of tabling, questions must reach the Table Office by 12.30pm to be included in the random computer shuffle (see below). Dates for the last days of tabling are shown on the order of questions rota and the pattern is as follows:

Tabled	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
For answer	Thursday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday

Exceptions to this pattern are: (a) oral questions to the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the Advocate General (if on the rota to answer), must be tabled at least five days (excluding Fridays and weekends) before the date for answer; (b) around recesses, when the Table Office will publish information about what arrangements will apply in good time for Members to plan their work.

After the cut-off at 12.30pm on each last tabling day, there is a random computer shuffle of the names of Members who have tabled oral questions to the department or departments concerned. Beyond a certain number for each department, questions are treated as 'lost' and are not printed; they are answered only if re-tabled by the tabling Member specifically for written answer. The successful questions are printed in the blue pages of the Vote Bundle on the following day in the order in which they will be called.

The reason why most questions to the Prime Minister relate to their engagements for the day is that this enables Members to ask supplementary questions on any topical subject without notice.

For engagements questions, 'E' on the question form is sufficient. Substantive questions to the Prime Minister may also be tabled.

Other than for the Prime Minister, and for topical questions, the wording of oral questions must give an indication of the subject of the intended supplementary question.

Topical orals

Topical oral questions usually occupy the last 15 minutes of a question time in which they occur. They are oral questions of which no formal notice of the substance of the question is given. In this respect, they are similar to the 'E' question to the Prime Minister; and 'T' written on the question form is sufficient for tabling a topical question.

Departments which answer topical questions are indicated on the order of questions rota.

Asking the question

In the House, when called, Members ask their question by standing up and stating the question number: 'Number [one], Mr Speaker'. After the Minister answers, the Member is called to ask one supplementary question. Other Members may also be called to ask supplementaries to the same question. Supplementary oral questions must relate to the subject matter of the original question. Questions on the order paper not reached in the time available receive a written answer.

Questions are sometimes grouped, and may therefore be taken out of numerical order. A Member whose question has been grouped and is not the lead question is called to ask a supplementary immediately after the Minister's answer to the supplementary from the lead questioner. Any grouping is indicated on the annunciators before the House sits. A Member with a question on the order paper who is called to ask a supplementary to an earlier question will not be called to ask his or her own question later on.

At Prime Minister's questions, Members with engagements questions (other than the first) are called only to ask a supplementary question. Similarly, during topical questions, Members with such questions (other than the first) are called only to ask their supplementary question.

If unable to attend question time, Members can withdraw or 'unstar' their question (convert it to written instead of oral answer)

by informing the Table Office. A withdrawal or unstarring may be communicated to the office by any means, including by Members' staff.

Written

Ordinary written questions

Questions may be tabled in the Lower Table Office from 10.00am on Mondays or from 9.00am on other sitting days (except non-sitting Fridays when the office opens at 11.00am till 3pm.)

Notices of questions handed in after half an hour after the moment of interruption (10.30pm on Monday, 7.30pm on a Tuesday and Wednesday, 5pm on Thursday or 3pm on Friday) are treated as if they had been handed in on the next tabling day.

Twenty written questions per day may be submitted via the e-tabling system. The system has a daily cut-off at 6.30pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 5.30pm on Thursdays and 2.30pm on Fridays. Questions e-tabled after those times will be treated as if they had been submitted on the next sitting day. They will also count against the next day's named day and overall e-tabling quota.

Unless the answer is required on a specific date (see below), questions for written reply are set down for answer two sitting days after they are received. An answer is not required to be given on this date, but the Government cannot answer before this date to allow for processing (including editorial corrections and transfers of questions between departments, if necessary). This is the default position, and Members may leave the date for answer blank for ordinary written questions.

There is no overall limit on the number of orderly ordinary written questions a Member may table.

Questions for answer on a named (specific) day

Members may submit up to five 'named day' questions each tabling day. These are questions for which the Member has requested a written answer on a specific day. The minimum period of notice is three sitting days (including non-sitting Fridays) and the pattern for minimum notice is therefore as follows:

Tabled	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
For answer	Thursday	Friday*	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday

*Monday if the Friday is a non-sitting day.

Answers

By convention, Government departments aim to answer parliamentary questions within 5 to 10 working days of tabling. Answers are formally made to the House.

Members receive answers to written questions by email. A short time later, the answers are published on the Q&A pages in a database which is searchable by Member, department, date or by UIN (the 'unique identifying number' given to each question when it is tabled).

Ministers are responsible for the timeliness and content of their answers to Parliamentary Questions, but Members with concerns about an answer should speak to the Table Office in the first instance.

Tabling

Other than by e-tabling, notices of oral and written questions can be given only in written form. Printed question forms are available from the Table Office (and can be overprinted on request with the Member's name and constituency), and an electronic template can also be provided, but questions may be tabled in any legible form. Relevant interests must be declared.

Questions may be handed in at the Table Office by Members or persons acting on their authority, sent by post or tabled electronically.

Members' staff may enter the Table Office, although priority is given to Members at all times. Questions may be left in a box outside the office. Unless handed in by a Member in person or tabled electronically, questions must bear the signature of a Member, but a Member may sign or hand in a question on behalf of another. Faxed, stamped or photocopied signatures cannot be accepted.

In order to table questions electronically, Members must use their personal e-tabling account. This can be accessed only from computers provided by the House, via the intranet and using the Member's Parliamentary Network login ID and password.

Questions may be sent through the post at any time. If received on a non-tabling day, they are treated as if tabled on the next tabling day.

Questions are published on the blue pages of the Vote Bundle on the day after they are tabled, indicating they are provisional, and Members may check these for accuracy, informing the Table Office

clerks as soon as possible of any errors. After editorial corrections and any transfers between departments, they are published the following day in the Question Book (also known as ‘the whites’).

General

When tabling questions, relevant interests must be declared, and the nature of those interests made known to the Table Office.

Questions are put to the senior Commons Minister of a Government department and not individual Ministers of that department.

Departments may transfer questions to each other, in which case the Member is informed. The transfer of written questions generally has little significance but it is important in the case of an oral question, because this will mean loss of the opportunity to put the question in the Chamber. An answer to a question from a Minister of a department other than the one to which the question was directed (a question which could have been transferred but was not) will start with the sentence ‘I have been asked to reply’.

Questions are edited by the clerks in the Table Office, under the authority of the Speaker, with the aim of applying the rules of the House, as well as ‘House’ style. Questions must be expressed in neutral terms and parliamentary language, and should be as clear and precise as possible to allow effective answers. The clerks in the Table Office can advise on the form and content of questions, and assist in reflecting a Member’s wishes as effectively as possible within the rules.

There is no formal parliamentary remedy for answers considered inadequate, although it may be possible to pursue the matter through further written questions and, as appropriate, in writing to the Chair of the Procedure Committee.

Rules on content

Parliamentary questions:

- must relate to matters for which a Minister has responsibility
- must seek information or press for action; they should not offer information, seek to advance an argument or request opinions (not enforced in respect of oral supplementary questions)
- must have a reasonable factual basis, and not be speculative or imputious. The more serious the matter raised, the more solid the basis required by the Speaker
- must not have been answered already in last three months of the current session (unless there is reason to believe the situation has changed). If a Minister declines to provide the information, or take the action, requested, it may not be requested again for three months. Refusals to provide information on certain grounds, such as security, may block questions on that subject for the rest of a session
- must not be seeking information that is readily available elsewhere in the public domain (including in answers to identical or similar questions in a previous session)
- may not relate to matters devolved to the Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly or National Assembly for Wales unless the questions (a) seek information the UK Government is empowered to require of the devolved executive, (b) relate to matters covered or to be covered by legislation introduced in the UK Parliament, (c) concern the operation of a concordat between the UK Government and the devolved executive, (d) concern matters in which UK Ministers have taken an official interest, or (e) press for action in areas where UK Ministers retain administrative powers.

Other rules include:

- the sub judice rule (see *Debate and rules of debate*)
- rules against hypothetical questions and against campaign questions (multiple questions on a single topic with minor variations), and
- the history rule (barring questions seeking information from more than 30 years ago).

Members are sent an email inviting them to contact the Table Office if a question received seems not to be in order. Often all that is required is clarification of the question. In practice there are many grey areas and the clerks in the Table Office can often suggest ways of wording, or re-wording, a question to bring it within the rules. The text of oral questions must be agreed by 12.30pm on the last tabling day to be included in the shuffle.

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303; for corrections, x3731, x3751, x3755.

Questions – urgent

Urgent questions are oral questions which have not appeared on the order paper but which, in the Speaker's opinion, are of an urgent character and relate to matters of public importance. Applications should be submitted to the Speaker before 11.30am on a Monday, 10.00am on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 8.15am on a Thursday or 8.30am on a Friday, for an oral answer on the same day. Relevant interests must be declared. Following an application, the relevant Government department is asked to provide a background briefing on the issue raised for the Speaker.

If the application is accepted by the Speaker, a notice is displayed on the annunciators. Urgent questions are taken immediately after question time, or at 11am on a Friday. Members should not refer publicly to their application unless it is successful. Members should not apply both for an urgent question and an emergency debate on the same subject on the same day.

Contact: The Speaker's Office, x5301, x5300.

Sittings of the House

See also *Organisation and timing of business* and *Westminster Hall*

General

The House sits at 2.30pm on Mondays, 11.30am on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and 9.30am on Thursdays and Fridays. The length of a sitting depends on the business before the House, but unless there is business which is 'exempted' by standing order or a business or programme motion, main proceedings end not later than 10pm on Mondays, 7pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 5pm on Thursdays and 2.30pm on Fridays (not including divisions taking place to bring business to a conclusion and the half-hour adjournment debate).

On a Tuesday or a Wednesday immediately after a recess, the Monday sitting times apply; and on the last day before a recess sitting times are sometimes altered by order of the House.

Fridays

At the start of a session, 13 Fridays are allocated for private Members' Bills and these are the only sitting Fridays (unless the House orders otherwise). Other Fridays, other than those that fall within recesses, are "non-sitting Fridays". On such days, questions and amendments to bills may be tabled between 11am and 3pm. Non-sitting Fridays are treated the same as sitting days when calculating periods of notice (except for oral questions).

Recesses

The provisional dates of the longer adjournments or recesses—Christmas, February, Easter, Spring Bank Holiday, Summer—are often announced for a year at a time. The dates of each recess, however, may be agreed to by the House on separate motions. A calendar for the session is made available in the Vote Office.

Prorogation

Sessions now usually run from May to May, and there are normally a few days between one session and the next when Parliament is prorogued and the House does not sit. No parliamentary business may be transacted during prorogation.

Contact: Journal Office, x3316.

Standing orders

Standing orders are rules made by the House governing the conduct of its business. They continue in force ('stand') from one session to another and from one Parliament to another. The volume containing the standing orders is available from the Vote Office and is periodically reprinted. The standing orders are far from being a complete guide to procedure and practice, since much of the House's business is determined by custom, precedent, resolutions of the House and Speaker's rulings. There are separate standing orders for private business (see *Private legislation*).

Standing orders can be superseded by motion ('Notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. [...]') or by new standing orders. Such motions can be debated and voted on.

Contact: Journal Office, x3319.

Statutory Instruments

General

Acts of Parliament (primary legislation) often confer powers on Ministers to make more detailed orders or regulations by means of statutory instruments (SIs), known as secondary, subordinate or delegated legislation. Many SIs are not subject to any parliamentary procedure, and simply become law on the date stated. Whether they are subject to parliamentary procedure, and if so which, is determined by the parent Act.

SIs required to be laid before the Commons, or both Houses, are laid in to the Journal Office by the relevant Government department and listed in an appendix to the Votes and Proceedings for that day. Copies of SIs laid before the House are available in the Vote Office.

Parliamentary procedures

The two main parliamentary procedures are:

- a. Negative procedure. Some SIs become law on the date stated, but will be annulled if either House (only the Commons for financial SIs) passes a motion within a specified time calling for annulment. The specified time is usually 40 days but can vary. Such a motion, known as a 'prayer', may be tabled (as an early day motion) by any Member. There is no formal obligation on the Government to

refer instruments that have been prayed against to a delegated legislation committee for debate, but sometimes such arrangements are made.

- b. Affirmative procedure. Some SIs must be approved by both Houses (the Commons alone for financial SIs) before they can come into force; therefore there is always the opportunity for a debate, usually in a delegated legislation committee. Most of these are laid as draft instruments. There are also some SIs which come into effect immediately but require subsequent approval by both Houses to continue in force.

In either case it is extremely rare for the parent Act to provide that either House can amend the SI.

Technical scrutiny

A joint committee of both Houses (the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments) scrutinises SIs. A committee of Commons Members alone (the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments) scrutinises financial SIs. These committees are not concerned with the merits of SIs, but with such matters as whether the authority conferred by the parent Act has been exceeded and whether the drafting is defective.

Debate

Debate on the merits of SIs takes place:

- a. on the floor of the House, for up to 1½ hours towards the end of a sitting. Debate on SIs subject to the negative procedure is not interrupted at the usual time but cannot continue beyond 11.30pm on a Monday, 8.30pm on a Tuesday or a Wednesday and 6.30pm on a Thursday even if the 1½ hours has not expired;
- b. or (far more often) in a delegated legislation committee. Any Member may attend and speak, but only the Members appointed by the Committee of Selection may vote. Debate may continue for 1½ hours (2½ hours for Northern Ireland instruments) or longer if two or more instruments are debated consecutively in the same committee. The motion is 'That the Committee has considered the instrument' and it cannot be amended. In the case of affirmative instruments, a motion to approve the instrument is moved subsequently in the House, on which the question may then be put without debate, usually at the end of a day's proceedings.

Lists of new SIs and SIs currently before the House are available from the Vote Office every Friday. The Statutory Instruments List sets out what instruments have been laid, what procedure, if any, applies and, in the case of negative instruments, the amount of time left to pray against them.

Contact: for general information, e.g. about the laying of SIs and praying times, Journal Office, x3317, x3310; for information about delegated legislation committees, Public Bill Office, x3256, x3258; and for information about the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, x2026.

Vote Office

The Vote Office supplies parliamentary and Government documents (including EU documents) to Members and others. In addition to the Vote Office in the Members' Lobby, there are issue points in the various outbuildings. Locations and opening times are given in the Members' Handbook, which also sets out Members' entitlements to free papers. All parliamentary and some non-parliamentary documents of the current and previous session are available on demand; older papers may be ordered and will normally be available within four hours, except that papers ordered after 3pm will be available the following morning. Information on new papers is available from Vote Offices and the intranet.

Contact: Vote Office inquiries, x3631.

Westminster Hall

Introduction

Sittings in "Westminster Hall" (located in the former Grand Committee Room up the staircase in the north-west corner of Westminster Hall) constitute sittings of the House (effectively a parallel chamber but without the means or authority for conducting divisions). Any Member may take part. Westminster Hall is used for largely uncontentious business which almost always consists of general debates.

Arrangement of business

Debates take place as follows:

Day	Business	Timing*
Mondays	Debates of public petitions or e-petitions determined by the Petitions Committee	From 4.30pm for 3 hours
Tuesdays and Wednesdays	Debates applied for by Members to the Table Office and allocated by ballot arranged by the Speaker's Office. The Backbench Business Committee has the option to allocate the 1½ hour debate on a Tuesday morning.	9.30am to 11.30am and from 2.30pm for 3 hours
Thursdays	Debates requested by Members and determined by the Backbench Business Committee; and debates related to select committee reports determined by the Liaison Committee (select committee chairs)	From 1.30pm for 3 hours

*'Injury' time will be added if debate is interrupted by division(s) in the Chamber.

Allocation of time

Backbenchers' debates may be of 30, 60 or 90 minutes duration, allocated by a mixture of ballot and representations to the Backbench Business Committee. The scheduling of debates must reflect the rota of availability of departmental ministers. This rota, and the business in Westminster Hall, is set out in Future Business. To be allocated time for a debate, Members must:

- apply to the Backbench Business Committee to make a case for debate of a particular topic in a 1½ hour debate on a Tuesday morning or a debate of 1½ or 3 hours on a Thursday; or
- apply to the Speaker's Office to enter the ballot to lead a general debate on a particular topic on a Tuesday or a Wednesday.

The deadline for applying through the Speaker's ballot for a debate for the following week is 10.00pm or the rise of House (whichever is the earlier) on a Monday.

Conduct of debate

Debate takes place on a motion “That this House has considered [the matter concerned].” Motions for debate in Westminster Hall must be in neutral terms, so they are not amendable. At the end of the debate, the motion is agreed to, or, if time runs out, it lapses. Divisions cannot take place in Westminster Hall.

The occupant of the Chair should be addressed by name (unless a deputy speaker is presiding, which is rare). Guidance can be sought from the clerk who sits on the Chair’s left – hand side. The same general rules and conventions apply in Westminster Hall debates as apply in the Chamber.

Contact: Backbench Business Committee, or the Table Office x3302, x3303 (applications for debates, proposed subjects and titles).

