



HOUSE OF COMMONS



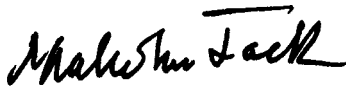
Business of the House and its Committees – a short guide



Foreword

This guide is written by staff in the Department of Chamber and Committee Services with the needs of new Members primarily in mind but it will be useful to others who want to know how the House and its committees work.

The guide is also intended to indicate opportunities available to Members to participate in, and influence, the business of the House and its committees in an effective way. Where necessary, sources of further detail are given, but procedure and practice are constantly evolving and often there is no substitute for discussion with the staff responsible for particular day-to-day operations.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Malcolm Jack". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line above the name.

Malcolm Jack

Clerk of the House

May 2010

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Introduction

This guide contains:

- ways of raising a matter before the House and its committees;
- sources of information on current and forthcoming business before the House and its committees;
- the organisation and timing of business in the Chamber;
- sections on procedure and practice arranged alphabetically. Each section gives brief information and a first contact point for more detailed advice as well as an indication of what other material is available.

Appended to this guide are:

- a summary guide to giving notice of questions, motions, amendments to bills and some other matters, including deadlines and the authority needed (appendix A);
- the layout, by subject, of the standing orders of the House (appendix B);
- an overview of the offices of the Department of Chamber and Committee Services, the services offered and office opening times (appendix C);
- suggestions for further reading on practice and procedure (appendix D).

Members are strongly advised to deal directly with the Clerks in different offices on matters to do with House and committee business, rather than delegating responsibility to their staff for such dealings. This allows Clerks to give better advice, tailored more closely to a Member's aims, and for decisions to be reached immediately with a Member's personal authority.

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.

The Parliamentary website (internet and intranet) contains virtually all the information and papers referred to in this guide (as well as the guide itself hyperlinked to relevant papers), including: the summary agenda and order paper; the votes and proceedings; parliamentary questions; early day motions; forthcoming adjournment debates; comprehensive information relating to public bills before Parliament; Hansard reports of proceedings and of ministerial answers to parliamentary questions; select committee reports and evidence; and the HCIO Brief Guides and other advisory material. On the intranet, the Online Members' Centre (<http://intranet.parliament.uk/hoc-omc>) is a convenient way of accessing this information.

Raising a matter before the House: summary

Procedure	Description
Written question (ordinary)	On each sitting day and non-sitting Friday, Members may table ordinary questions for written answer. ¹
Written question (named day)	On each sitting day and non-sitting Friday, ¹ Members may table five questions for written answer on a specified date.
Oral question	For each question time, up to 25 Members are selected by ballot to put a substantive, and a supplementary, question for oral answer in the Chamber, if reached. Other Members may be called to ask supplementary questions. ²
Topical (oral) question	For each relevant question time, ten Members are selected by ballot to put a topical question (of which no notice is given) for oral answer in the Chamber. Other Members may also be called. ²
Urgent (oral) question	Applications for an urgent question to be asked at the end of question time may be made on each sitting day in writing to the Speaker; strict criteria govern their acceptance.
Early day motion (EDM)	Members may table EDMs on sitting days and may also add their names, or table amendments, to other Members' motions.
Amendment to a motion on the order paper	Amendments to motions may be tabled until the rising of the House on the sitting day before the motion is to be debated. Selection of amendments for debate is a matter for the Speaker.

¹ Questions and amendments to bills may also be tabled on certain days in recesses which are announced in a note at the end of the summary agenda in advance of each recess (see appendix A).

² At the Speaker's discretion.

Procedure	Description
Adjournment debate (backbench)	Mainly allocated by ballot. Half an hour at the end of each sitting in the Chamber and for one and a half hours or half an hour on Tuesdays and Wednesdays in Westminster Hall.
Adjournment debate (before a recess)	Depending on time available and subject to being called by the Speaker. Almost any matter may be raised.
Emergency debate	Applications must be made in writing to the Speaker and conform to strict criteria governing their acceptance.
Topical debate	The choice of subjects for topical debate is made by the Leader of the House.
Question on business to the Leader of the House	Each Thursday.
Speech in the Chamber, Westminster Hall	Subject to scope of debate and the number of other Members taking part.
Intervention in another Member's speech	Subject to the Member speaking giving way and limited to very brief and relevant remarks.
Public petition	Members may present petitions to the House on behalf of constituents on sitting days, in the Chamber or informally.
Prayer against a statutory instrument	A motion expressing disapproval of a statutory instrument may trigger referral of the instrument to committee for debate.
Private Member's bill (ballot)	Allocated by ballot. The 20 ballot bills are introduced before other private Members' bills.
Private Member's bill (presentation)	Members may present a bill (without debate) then to the House for a first reading before the start of the main business.

Procedure	Description
Private Member's bill (ten minute rule)	A Member may make a brief speech in the Chamber on Tuesdays and Wednesdays for leave to present a bill (another Member may speak in opposition). Applications are usually made in the Public Bill Office three weeks ahead and are governed by informal arrangements overseen by the whips.
Amendment to a bill	Members may table amendments to public bills on sitting days and non-sitting Fridays. ¹ Selection and grouping for debate are matters for the Speaker in the House or Chair in committee.
Public bill committee	Scrutiny of a public bill, including evidence-taking. Only Members nominated to such committees may take part in proceedings.
Grand committee	Oral questions, short debates and other business take place at sittings of the Northern Ireland, Welsh and Scottish grand committees. Only Members nominated to such committees and Ministers may take part in proceedings.
European committee	Ministerial statements followed by questions and then debate on a Government motion take place in European committees on documents referred by the European Scrutiny Committee. Any Member may attend and speak.
Delegated legislation committee	Short debates on certain statutory instruments take place in delegated legislation committees. Any Member may attend and speak.
Select committee reports and other activity	Select committees are responsible for their own programmes. They may seek a debate in the Chamber or Westminster Hall on a report or a reference on the order paper to a report or other document relevant to a particular debate.

¹Questions and amendments to bills may also be tabled on certain days in recesses which are announced in a note at the end of the summary agenda in advance of each recess (see *appendix A*).

Key sources of information: summary

All documents referred to below are available from the Vote Office and via the Parliamentary website (www.parliament.uk and the intranet). PIMS (the Parliamentary Information Management System) is a searchable database, only accessible via the parliamentary intranet, containing information on all aspects of parliamentary business.

Initial advice on any aspect of business is available in the Chamber from the Clerks at the Table, and from the Table Office (just outside the Chamber at the Speaker's Chair end); they will also identify the right person or office to give detailed advice.

Information can also be obtained from the Members' Centre in the Atrium of Portcullis House.

Information on	Published documents (Vote Bundle)	Informal and online sources
Today's business	Order paper for business in the Chamber ¹ and Westminster Hall, sittings of all committees and list of written ministerial statements.	Live feed from the Chamber via the annunciator network ¹ and the 'Video and Audio' section of the website; the Online Members' Centre and 'business' section of the website. Hansard reports of proceedings are available online three to four hours after they have occurred.
Future business	Order paper, future business, sections A-G; and the rota of future oral question times.	The Leader of the House's statement each Thursday in the Chamber; the Online Members' Centre and 'business' section of the website.
Yesterday's business	Debate: Hansard (Official Report) Daily Part Decisions: Votes and Proceedings (published in the Vote Bundle).	Hansard reports and the Votes and Proceedings are online.

¹ The annunciator scroll bar gives first notice of some information, for example on ministerial statements, urgent questions and the subjects of some topical debates, together with oral questions withdrawn or grouped.

Tabled questions	Blue pages of the Vote Bundle, if tabled the previous day; the Question Book, if tabled on an earlier day and not yet due for answer.	PIMS (online Parliamentary Information Management System), accessible via the intranet, for all questions and answers. The Question Book is available online in the Online Members' Centre.
Answers to questions	Available in the Library on the day given. Published in Hansard (Official Report) the following day.	Sent direct to the tabling Member by the Government. Also available online via PIMS.
Early day motions (EDMs)	Blue pages of the Vote Bundle for new Motions and added names. ²	There is a searchable EDM database on the website.
Public bills and amendments tabled to them	Weekly Public Bill List for all such bills and stages reached. Blue pages of the Vote Bundle for new amendments to bills.	See 'Bills and Legislation' via the 'business' section of the website.
Private bills and related matters	List of Private Bills. Blue pages of Vote Bundle for information on private bills and associated committees.	As above.
Statutory instruments etc.	Weekly Statutory Instruments List for all delegated legislation laid before the House and the time left for objection.	See 'business' section of the website.
Legislative reform orders	List of regulatory reform proposals published each Wednesday in Vote Bundle.	See 'business' section of the website.
European documents	List of European Documents (to be considered in the House) in the Vote Bundle and stages reached. Information on documents referred to in European Committees in Future Business Section E.	See 'business' section of the website.
Select committees	Meetings and dates and times of publication of reports are listed on the order paper. Reports and evidence are noted in an appendix to the Votes and Proceedings.	See 'Committees' via the 'Business' section of the website.

² See the *Early day motions* section of the guide for a fuller explanation.

The organisation and timing of business

The main categories of business, and their usual timings, are as follows:

Mon & Tue	Wed¹	Thur	Fri (if sitting)	Type of business
2.30pm	11.30am	10.30am	9.30am	Prayers at start of sitting.
c.2.33pm	c.11.33am	c.10.33am	—	Private bills. Can make progress at this time only if unopposed.
c.2.33pm	c.11.33am	c.10.33am	—	Question time (Prime Minister's questions takes place from 12 to 12.30pm on Wednesdays).
3.30pm	12.30pm	11.30am	11am	Urgent questions, ministerial statements, the announcement of business (on Thursdays) and applications for emergency debates (if any). When possible the order paper will give notice of ministerial statements but these may also be made without written notice. The annunciator will display information on statements and urgent questions by 1pm on Monday and Tuesday and as soon as possible on other days. ² Points of order may be raised when these items of business are concluded.
3.30pm <i>or later</i>	12.30pm <i>or later</i>	11.30am <i>or later</i>	c.9.33am	Preliminary business, including the presentation of bills. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays ten minute rule motions for leave to bring in a bill may take up to 20 minutes. On other days preliminary business rarely occupies more than a few minutes.

continued

Mon & Tue	Wed¹	Thur	Fri (if sitting)	Type of business
3.30pm <i>or later</i>	12.30pm <i>or later</i>	11.30am <i>or later</i>	c.9.33am	Main business of the day, including Government bills and motions, opposition day debates and (on sitting Fridays) private Members' bills. The items on which debate is expected to arise are indicated on the summary agenda by bold type. ³
10pm	7pm	6pm	2.30pm	The "moment of interruption" (when main business normally ends, giving way to presentation of public petitions and the half hour end-of-day adjournment debate).

Business can be exempted from interruption at these times under standing orders or a specific order of the House and **may** continue for the period, or until the time, specified in the order. Items of business which are not exempt but which are unopposed may be agreed at this time 'on the nod' but a single objection voiced in the Chamber is enough to prevent such agreement.

until c. 10.30pm <i>or later</i>	until c. 7.30pm <i>or later</i>	until c. 6.30pm <i>or later</i>	until c. 3 pm	Public petitions (if any) and the end-of-day adjournment debate take place when all other business has been concluded. The end-of-day adjournment debate usually lasts for half an hour. ⁴
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¹On a Wednesday immediately following a recess, the sitting hours and other timings are the Monday ones. These days are shown on the calendar for the session available from the Vote Office. For simplicity, the rest of this guide does not normally point out the change in timings on such days.

²Notice of some oral ministerial statements is given in advance by the Leader of the House and appears on the order paper. On sitting Fridays, urgent questions and statements take place at 11am.

³Some items of business are required under standing orders to be agreed, or voted on, straightaway ('forthwith'), without debate. This will be indicated on the order paper.

⁴Formally, the end-of-day 'half-hour adjournment debate' can go on until half an hour after the moment of interruption, even if it starts well before that time, or for no more than half an hour if it starts after the moment of interruption. In practice it is unusual for it to last much longer than 30 minutes.

Future business

The main business for the forthcoming week and, provisionally, the week after is announced by the Leader of the House at 11.30am on Thursdays (or soon thereafter if other statements are made first) indicated by ‘Business Question’ on the summary agenda and order paper. At this time Members may ask questions on the announcements made, as well as press for time to be made available for debate of matters of their own choosing.

The House’s forthcoming business (including the Government departments answering oral questions in the House and the subjects of adjournment debates) is summarised in parts A-G of Future Business which follows on from the main order paper. This can be accessed via the parliamentary website from the ‘What’s on’ section of the home page.

In the mornings (before the House sits), the annunciators provide information about future business. The scroll-bar at the bottom of the annunciator is used to display information that has become available after the order paper has been published; for instance in relation to oral statements, urgent questions or topical debate subjects.

There are Friday sittings only on the 13 days allocated for private Members’ bills (unless the House orders otherwise). There are also sittings on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays in Westminster Hall (see *Westminster Hall*).

The day’s business

The order paper lists almost all the House’s business for a particular day, indicating how long is provided for each item 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 (even when the next sitting will be after a recess).

Members may come to the Table Office at any time to see items which have been tabled for the following day's business, whether to table amendments or for other purposes.

It is important to bear in mind that the House can alter usual practice and the effect of standing orders by an order made on a previous day or earlier in the same sitting (though not usually without notice).

In normal circumstances divisions (votes) can occur at almost any moment after question time has finished, depending on the business before the House and the provisions on timing that apply. Typically a division will take up to 15 minutes with voting taking place by each Member passing through one of the lobbies on either side of the Chamber. In many cases, however, divisions sought after the moment of interruption are deferred until the next Wednesday (and conducted using a paper form handed in by each Member). The principal exceptions to the deferred divisions rule are divisions relating to the passage of legislation (see *Divisions*).

Business is generally brought to an end at 'the moment of interruption' (10pm on Mondays and Tuesdays, 7pm on Wednesdays, 6pm on Thursdays and 2.30pm on Fridays). After that there can be divisions, the presentation of petitions, and the half-hour adjournment debate at the end of proceedings. Some other items can be taken after the moment of interruption if:

- a Business of the House motion (of which notice must be given on the order paper) is agreed allowing extra time;
- the time allocated in a programme order relating to a bill has not yet expired;
- standing orders exempt the particular business from the usual time of interruption (as indicated on the order paper). The most important business exempted is proceedings on finance bills (to

any hour) and debates on the approval of statutory instruments (for up to one and a half hours).

- the business is unopposed (for example, motions for changes to select committee membership or some private Members' bills on Fridays at 2.30pm). In such cases items of business can be agreed but only without debate and if there is no objection.

Motions relating to business previously debated in a delegated legislation committee or European committee, which are dealt with forthwith (without debate), are also exempted and are often taken after the moment of interruption. All such motions can be voted on, although if a division is sought it will be deferred as described above (and see *Divisions*).

The order paper indicates the maximum time available for each item of business. Business does not always occupy all the time provided.

The greater part of the House's time is at the Government's disposal. Exceptions are set out in standing orders (for example, for question time, opposition day debates, private Members' bills on certain Fridays, and debates on estimates chosen by select committees). However, the time taken by individual items of business is often determined by backbenchers or the opposition.

Proposals to establish a Backbench Business Committee which would have responsibility for allocating time to certain types of backbench-initiated business were put forward by the House of Commons Reform Committee in their first report of Session 2008/09, *Rebuilding the House*, HC 1117. These proposals were not implemented before the end of the 2005-10 Parliament.

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303.

Procedure and practice

Adjournment debates

See also *General and topical debates*, *Grand Committees* and *Westminster Hall*

Introduction

An adjournment debate (on the motion “That this House do now adjourn” or, in Westminster Hall, “That the sitting be now adjourned”) is simply a way of having a debate without a substantive proposition (a motion) which is open to amendment and on which the House has to come to a decision. In the past the Government used adjournment motions for wide-ranging debates on a variety of policy issues where no decision of the House was sought, but recently the House agreed to a new procedure for such debates (see *General and topical debates*).

Periodic adjournment debates

Before recesses the Government traditionally provides Members with the opportunity to raise matters of their own choosing by arranging debate of “matters to be considered before the forthcoming adjournment” on a motion for the adjournment of the House. Members usually give written notice to the Speaker of their intention to be in the Chamber to participate in such a debate.

Other backbench adjournment debates

Adjournment debates at the end of each sitting day in the House, and in Westminster Hall, provide regular opportunities for backbench Members to raise constituency matters or other matters relating to Government expenditure, administration or policy, and to obtain a response from a Minister. Applications should be made in a letter to the Speaker or on the form available from the Speaker’s Office, and should state the proposed subject, and preferred forum and length of debate.

Proposed subjects (i) must relate to a matter for which a Minister has responsibility, (ii) must not principally be seeking a change in legislation and (iii) must not involve reference to a case that is before a court in the UK (*sub judice*). The Table Office can provide advice on proposed subjects and *sub judice* issues. There is a leaflet on *sub judice* available in the Table Office and on that office's section of the intranet in the Online Members' Centre. Proposed titles of debates must be purely descriptive and expressed in neutral terms (not slogans or advocacy).

End of day (half-hour) adjournment debates

End-of-day adjournment debates are held in the last half-hour of each day's sitting. Applications should be submitted in writing to the Speaker's Office by 7pm (or the rising of the House if earlier) on Wednesday for the following week. Thursday's subject is chosen by the Speaker; for other days Members are selected by ballot conducted on Thursday mornings.

At 10pm on Mondays and Tuesdays, 7pm on Wednesdays, 6pm on Thursdays and 2.30pm on Fridays, or after all other business on the order paper has been disposed of, the Speaker calls a whip to move 'That this House do now adjourn'. The Member is then called to speak. It is the practice to leave sufficient time for the Minister to reply. There is no opportunity to speak again after the Minister has concluded. Other Members may only make a speech in such a debate if they have the agreement of the Member concerned and the Minister, but it is possible to intervene in the Member's or the Minister's speech if he or she is willing to give way. Proceedings may last only 30 minutes unless they begin before the usual time.

Westminster Hall debates

At sittings in Westminster Hall on Tuesdays and Wednesdays there are two 1½ hour debates and three half-hour debates. The 1½ hour debates are intended to be wider debates involving a number of Members. Ministers from each Department are available to respond to such debates only every other week, according to a rota set out in Future Business part B. Members may apply both for a 1½ hour debate and a half-hour debate, but will not be successful in more than one ballot. Applications should be made to the Speaker's Office by 10pm (or the rising of the House if earlier) on Tuesday for the following week. Ballots are held on Wednesday mornings.

Members are notified by the Speaker's Office of the result of their application. Successful applications are listed in the future business paper. Any relevant interests relating to successful applications should be declared immediately in the Table Office. Unsuccessful applications are considered again only if re-submitted for a subsequent week. Members will not be granted more than one debate in the same week, or two debates in successive weeks. Practice on speeches and interventions for half-hour debates in Westminster Hall are the same as for half-hour adjournment debates in the Chamber (see above).

Contact: The Speaker's Office, x5301, x5300 (applications for debates); Table Office, x3302, x3303 (proposed subjects/titles).

Amendments

General

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

Amendments are subsidiary to the proposition, whether a motion or part of a bill, that they are seeking to change and are disposed of first (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

See also *Public bills* and *Public bill committees*

Tabling

Amendments to bills may be tabled either in the Public Bill Office or the Table Office. If Members wish to discuss the content of an amendment they wish to table, or to sign, they should contact the Public Bill Office. On the day of second reading, amendments for committee may be handed in at the Table in the Chamber as soon as the second reading is agreed (unless the House has agreed otherwise, for example, when considering emergency legislation).

Amendments may be tabled by being handed in or posted, but not faxed or emailed. Unless handed in by a Member in person they must bear the signature of a Member, though a Member may sign on behalf of another; the exception to the rule on signing is that Members may introduce a member of their staff to the Clerks in the Public Bill Office who will then be able to table amendments on their behalf. Relevant interests must be declared, even if only adding a name to an existing amendment.

Drafting and printing

The Clerks in the Public Bill Office will advise on the drafting of amendments, new clauses and schedules. Amendments tabled are numbered and printed overnight. A ‘marshalled’ amendment paper is produced on the day before the bill is taken. This paper contains all the amendments tabled to date arranged in the order in which they relate to the bill as it is being considered.

Explanatory statements

Members tabling an amendment to a bill in public bill committee 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 of amendments tabled in public bill committees. Thus, for a Thursday sitting, amendments should be tabled not later than the rising of the House on Monday; and for a Tuesday sitting, by the rising of the House on the previous Thursday.

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. For the report (from committee) stage of a bill in the House, and in Committee of the whole House, two days’ notice is required.

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.

Rules

Common reasons for an amendment being out of order are:

- it is outside the scope of the motion or the bill (determined by the bill's existing content) or of the relevant clause within the bill
- in the case of a bill, it involves finance not covered by a financial resolution agreed by the House (which only a Minister can move)
- it would amount to 'negativing' (voting against) the motion, bill 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

The Chair's *selection list* is published in hard copy (in the No Lobby, the Table Office, the Vote Office and the Library) and on the intranet on the day that a bill is to be taken, or if possible the previous day. The Chair seeks to group amendments to assist debate. Even for amendments which are technically in order, the Speaker or committee chair has the power of selection.

Amendments to bills to leave out clauses or schedules are not selected in committee, since a question is automatically put 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 considerably more stringent at report stage than in committee. (See also *Public bill committees*).

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

Further information: Public Bill Office leaflet on *Tabling amendments to bills*.

Business statement

The business for the forthcoming week, and provisionally for the week after, is announced by the Leader of the House at 11.30am 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 part A of the Future Business section of the order paper on the following day (or part B for sittings in Westminster Hall), and in the ‘Calendar’ section of the Parliamentary website.

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303

Chamber

See also *Debates and rules of debate and illustration of the Chamber* on p.24

Seats

No places are 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.

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 enquiries 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 team of 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 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

When entering or leaving the Chamber, Members should make a slight bow of respect to the Chair. They should not cross between the Chair and the Member speaking.

Other rules: no eating or drinking; no reading of newspapers; no electronic devices which make a noise; no bulky objects such as briefcases; men should wear jackets and ties. Electronic devices should not be used as an aide memoire in debate.

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303.



- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| S The Speaker | D Despatch Boxes |
| P Press Galleries | M Mace ² |
| H Hansard reporters | L Lines ³ |
| O Government Officials Box (advisers to Ministers) | B Bar of the House |
| C Clerks at the Table ¹ | X Cross benches |
| T Table of the House | G Members' Galleries |

¹ When the House goes into Committee, the Speaker leaves the Chair, and the Chair sits in the chair of the Clerk of the House, which is on the left.

² When the House goes into Committee, the Mace is put below the Table on brackets.

³ Lines over which Members may not step when speaking from the front benches.

Closure

Most debates end after or at a fixed time. More open-ended debates can be brought to a decision by 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 on the question which has been proposed by the Chair.

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). The Speaker has discretion whether to accept the closure motion, and may decide that the matter under debate has not been adequately debated. 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.

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

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303.

Further information: Standing Orders Nos. 29, 36 and 89.

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 his deputies. The Chairman sits at the Clerks' Table and the Mace is placed on the brackets under the Table instead of upon it.

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).

Bills are normally taken in public bill committee and a decision of the House is needed immediately after second reading to commit them to a Committee of the whole House instead. This is usually done for bills of constitutional importance, urgent bills and parts of the Finance Bill, or for short, uncontroversial or technical bills.

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: Secretary to the Chairman of Ways and Means, x3771, Public Bill Office, x4921.

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 and then the motion.

Sometimes proceedings are formal, without an opportunity for debate (a Member moves a motion formally and the Speaker immediately puts the question).

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 put. There is no seconding of motions (except for the address replying to the Queen's Speech).

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.

Time limits

Backbenchers

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 speeches (of, say, 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.

Front bench speeches

A time limit of 20 minutes may on occasion be applied to the opening front bench speeches of the Government, the Official Opposition and the second largest opposition party. A minute is added for each intervention (but no extra time for time taken by the intervention itself) up to a maximum of 15 interventions.

Topical debates

A special regime of mandatory speech limits on front bench speeches applies in topical debates (in addition to limits which may be imposed on backbench speeches as above):

- Minister: 10 minutes (when opening the debate);
- Official Opposition: 10 minutes (either at the outset or before the Ministerial wind-up);
- second largest opposition party: six minutes (either at the outset or before the Ministerial wind-up).

In each case a minute is added for each intervention up to a maximum of 10 for Government and Official Opposition and six for the second largest opposition party, when they speak at the beginning of a debate.

A leaflet on time limits on speeches is available from the Table Office and via that office's section of the Parliamentary intranet (and see *General and topical debates*).

Rules and conduct

Speeches should not be read (except opening speeches or when there is special reason for precision), but Members may make use of notes, especially at the beginning of a Parliament, when greater latitude is given to new Members. However, too great a reliance on a text tends to stifle debate and makes it much harder for a Member to respond to interventions. Quotations from documents must be reasonably short. Electronic devices should not be used as aide-memoires in the Chamber.

After speaking, Members should, as a matter of courtesy, remain in the Chamber at least for the next two speeches. It is also normal courtesy to be present for the front-bench winding-up speeches.

A Member who is unable to observe these courtesies should explain the reason both to the occupant of the Chair and to the Members concerned. Members intending to refer in debate to another Member should inform that Member in advance.

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. 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.

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

Further information: Standing Orders Nos. 28-37 and 42-47; and *Erskine May*, pp 424-455.

Divisions

General

When the Speaker puts a question (brings a matter for decision), Members shout ‘Aye’ or ‘No’, and the Speaker says ‘I think the Ayes [or Noes] have it’. If this is challenged by further shouts of ‘No’ [or ‘Aye’], the Speaker calls a division, saying ‘Clear the lobby’. Division bells ring, and the exit doors from the lobbies are locked by the doorkeepers. Four tellers are appointed to count the votes (one from each side for each lobby). Members who wish 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 statement of the result 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 tellers count aloud as Members leave the lobbies. Eight minutes after the question was first put, the Speaker orders that the entrances to the lobbies be locked.

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. There is no formal way of recording abstentions.

Divisions are concluded by the statement, usually by a whip, of ‘all out’ to the tellers in each lobby, signifying that there is no Member left to vote, and 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 concluding a division 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 or Tuesday, 7pm on Wednesday and 6pm 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). The result is later announced in the House. Members may not hand in a ballot paper for another Member.

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, x3253, x4921.

Further information: *Erskine May*, pp. 405-418 (for various ways in which mistakes and unusual circumstances have been dealt with).

Early day motions (EDMs)

General

EDMs are motions set down for ‘an early day’ (no specific day). No time is available for debating such motions, but they are printed in the vote bundle (in a separate section on blue pages) and provide an opportunity for Members to register an opinion and gather support (‘added names’) on almost any subject. No proceedings in the House are triggered by an EDM gaining any particular number of names in support. 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; no reference to matters *sub judice* (see *Debate and rules of debate*); no unparliamentary language; no irony; titles must be expressed in neutral terms and be purely descriptive; 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 for a sitting day 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. 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 or Tuesdays, 7.30pm on Wednesdays, 6.30pm 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. Individual names may also be withdrawn.

Printing

EDMs are printed in the vote bundle the day after they are tabled, and reprinted on each day during the rest of that week, and the following week, if names are added. After the first occasion, only the first six names and the new names are printed, together with the total number of names. The Member in charge of the EDM determines the first six names and their order.

PIMS (the Parliamentary Information Management System), accessible via the intranet, provides a fully searchable database

for EDMs, updated twice a day. The title, number, full text, and supporters' names and party affiliations, for each motion and 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.

Further information: Table Office Leaflet on *Parliamentary Questions and Early Day Motions*.

Emergency debates

See also *Urgent questions*

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 [topic]". Requests should be made to the Speaker's Office by 12 noon on Mondays and Tuesdays, 10.30am on Wednesdays and 9.30am 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).

Further information: A leaflet, *Urgent questions and emergency debates*, is available from the Table Office and via that office's intranet homepage.

European Union matters

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 and its committees 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

The 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 (the

debate usually being 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. Amendments may be proposed to the motion. After a total of 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. Future Business part E 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; the scrutiny reserve resolution of 17 November 1998 is set out as an appendix to *Standing Orders of the House of Commons*; a leaflet, *European committees*, is available from the Public Bill Office.

Financial procedures

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. 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.

Each Government department publishes detailed expenditure plans for the ensuing three years usually in June (forming part of each department’s **annual report**).

The **main Supply estimates** are published by each department in about April. There are also supplementary estimates (usually twice a year) and a ‘vote on account’ in December to authorise a provisional allocation of funds for the forthcoming financial year. There may also be ‘excess votes’ after the financial year ends. All public spending must be approved by Parliament and the questions on estimates are put formally, without debate (except see **Estimates days** below).

Consolidated fund bills give legislative force to the estimates and vote on account. There are usually three such bills each year, of which two are appropriation bills which allocate the sums granted to particular purposes. Questions on these bills are put forthwith, 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 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. In practice, Estimates days are used for debating select committee reports chosen by the Liaison Committee.

Principles

Money is voted only on the initiative of the Government. Thus the Commons could reduce estimates but not increase them; the Finance Bill is not amended by the House of Lords.

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, x3253; Clerk of the Public Accounts Committee, x3273.

General committees

See also *Public bill committees*, *Statutory Instruments*, *European Union matters*, *Grand Committees* and the sections on *Northern Ireland*, *Scottish*, *Welsh* and *Regional business*

General committees (formerly known as ‘standing committees’) are those that meet to examine and debate legislation, or other matters, referred to them by the House and whose organisation, rules of debate and practice reflect those followed on the floor of the House. The general committees are:

- public bill committees
- delegated legislation committees
- European committees
- the Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh Grand Committees, and
- (unusual) second reading committees.

Each type of committee is described under its own heading elsewhere in this guide.

Contact: Public Bill Office, x6758.

General and topical debates

See also *Adjournment debates* and *Emergency 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.

Topical debates

The Government may decide that a general debate is to be conducted as a topical debate, the subject being a matter of regional, national or international importance.

Topical debates are limited to one and a half hours. In addition to any time limits which may be applied to backbench speeches by the Speaker, time limits also apply automatically to front bench speeches (see *Debates and rules of debate*).

The Leader of the House is responsible for the arrangements for topical debates and has invited applications for subjects from Members. To date, topical debates have been held on Thursdays.

When the subject matter of a general or topical debate is expressed in neutral terms no amendments to the motion may be tabled. The motion may be voted on at the end of the debate (see *Amendments (general)*).

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303 (procedure). The Leader of the House’s Office (suggested subjects).

Further information: Standing Orders Nos. 24, 24A and 24B; Table Office leaflet *Time limits on speeches* (section on topical debates).

Grand Committees

See also *Northern Ireland business*, *Scottish business*, *Welsh business* and *Regional business*

Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland 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 the Welsh and Northern Ireland Grand Committees.

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

- oral questions at the beginning of certain sittings (for 45 minutes in the Scottish Grand and 30 minutes in the Northern Ireland Grand and Welsh Grand). Questions (not more than one per Member) should reach the Table Office by 12.30pm five days (excluding Fridays and weekends) before the date for answer, indicating that they are for answer in the relevant grand committee. (The precise deadline is given in a note at the end of the summary agenda of the order paper of the House);
- Ministerial statements;
- motions on statutory instruments (Northern Ireland and Scottish Grand only) and on proposals for draft Orders in Council (Northern Ireland Grand only);
- adjournment or general debates. In the Scottish Grand, where the choice of subjects is allocated between the parties, the debate is on a motion to adjourn. In the Northern Ireland Grand and Welsh Grand, which debate subjects referred to them by the House, the motion is ‘That the Committee has considered the matter of [topic];’

- half-hour adjournment debates at the end of the day's business allocated by ballot. Proposed subjects should be sent to the Speaker's Office in the week before the sitting (the exact deadline is given in a note at the end of the summary agenda of the order paper for the House).

Grand committee sittings and business to be conducted

Sittings of, and the business to be conducted by, grand committees are determined by motions moved by the Government and agreed to by the House. An order paper is produced and distributed for each Grand Committee meeting.

Contact: Public Bill Office, x4921 or x3253.

Further information: Standing Orders Nos. 93 to 117.

Hansard

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, written ministerial statements, petitions, written ministerial corrections and written answers. 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 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. To check speeches made in committee in person, Members need to visit the 5th floor of No. 7 Millbank. 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)
- written answers to questions ('W' columns)
- Ministerial corrections ('MC' columns)

Contact: Editor, x3388; Deputy Editors (House), x1480 (committees), x5291; Managing Editors (House), x2350, x5257 (committees), x5762, x6846; and Sub-Editors (Westminster Hall), x5522.

Further information: *The Official Report (Hansard)–A Guide for Members.*

Hybrid bills

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 bills*), and they are subject to certain proceedings in addition to the normal stages that a public bill has to pass through. The most significant recent example was the Crossrail Bill in sessions 2006-07 and 2007-08.

Contact: Public Bill Office, x4921.

Further information: *Erskine May* pp. 640-7.

Joint committees

Joint committees have members from both Houses sitting as a single committee under one Chair. Those provided for in the Standing Orders are the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, the Joint Committee on Consolidation, &c., Bills, the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Joint Committee on Tax Law Rewrite Bills. Joint committees are also often 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.

Legislative reform orders

General

Under the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006, the Government may make an order to amend or repeal primary legislation even where there is no provision in that legislation for it to be altered by delegated legislation.

This power is subject to a number of constraints. For example, an order laid under section 1 of the 2006 Act may remove or reduce a legislative burden only if it does not also remove any necessary protection. Legislative reform orders (LROs) cannot be used to amend provisions of constitutional significance (for example, the whole of the Human Rights Act 1998 and Part 1 of the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006 itself are specifically excluded; the latter so the power cannot be used to extend itself or to remove safeguards). An order laid under section 2 of the 2006 Act can only promote the regulatory principles of transparency, accountability, proportionality, consistency and targeting.

Scrutiny and procedure

All LROs are subject to scrutiny by the Regulatory Reform Committee. Legislative reform orders follow one of three parliamentary procedures: negative, affirmative or super-affirmative resolution procedure. The Act lays down a prescribed timetable for, amongst other things, when a Minister's recommendation for either the negative or the affirmative resolution procedure can be up-graded to a more demanding procedure. The Regulatory Reform Committee (and its equivalent in the Lords) has the power to veto an order. In the case of an LRO subject to the negative resolution procedure, the Minister may make the order after 40 days of it being laid. For orders subject to the affirmative, and the super-affirmative, procedure, the approval of each House is required. In the Commons, proceedings on the floor of the House depend on how the order was treated within the Regulatory Reform Committee:

- **approved without division:** question put in the House without debate (although the Committee may recommend a debate);
- **approved after a division:** debate in the House for up to 1½ hours; or
- **rejected:** motion to disagree with the Committee's report debated in the House for up to 3 hours; if motion agreed, question then put forthwith on draft order.

A list of regulatory reform proposals currently before the House is published in the Vote Bundle each Wednesday and is available from the Vote Office.

Contact: Clerk of the Regulatory Reform Committee, x2830.

Further information: Leaflet (available from the Regulatory Reform Committee).

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 maiden speech.

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

Members' interests

General

Members have two distinct but overlapping obligations in relation to the disclosure of interests. They are required to *register* certain interests within specified periods, and also to *declare* relevant interests (including those which are registered) in the course of parliamentary proceedings and in some other circumstances.

The rules on these duties are complex 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 has overall responsibility for: the maintenance of the Register of Members' Financial Interests and other registers of interests; advice to Members and others on the registration of interests (assisted by the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests); advice to the Committee on Standards and Privileges on the operation and interpretation of the Code of Conduct and related matters; and the investigation of complaints against Members in respect of the registration or declaration of interests and other aspects of the propriety of their conduct.

The Committee on Standards and Privileges is responsible for oversight of the Commissioner's work in all these areas, as well as for considering reports from the Commissioner on complaints against Members.

Registration of interests

New Members will receive a registration form from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards which they are required to complete and return within one month of taking their seats.

Subsequent changes to registrable interests must be notified to the Commissioner within four weeks of each change occurring.

Declaration of interests

Key points in respect of the declaring of interests are:

- The rule relating to declarations of interest is more wide-ranging than that for registration: it covers not just direct and current interests but indirect interests, past interests and expected future interests.
- Interests must be declared not just when speaking but when giving written notices, including questions and early day motions (EDMs), and when adding names to EDMs and other motions. In these circumstances an '[R]' will be included against the Member's name when it appears on the order paper or notice paper.
- Interests must be declared when requesting adjournment debates or emergency debates from the Speaker.
- The requirement to declare interests extends to correspondence and meetings with Ministers, public officials and other Members.
- When declaring an interest that is not yet registered, or not required to be registered, in relation to a written notice, a description of the interest should be given to the relevant office.
- Registering an interest does not remove the need to declare it when appropriate.

- Registration of an interest is sufficient for a Member to vote without any further declaration, even if the Register has not yet been published. If a Member votes without having first registered a relevant interest, that interest should be registered as soon as possible after the vote.
- Members should note relevant interests when booking catering facilities.

Paid advocacy is prohibited. Members must not engage in any parliamentary proceeding or, in a parliamentary context, seek to influence others in such a way as to benefit exclusively a body outside Parliament in which they have a pecuniary interest. Further details on how and when the prohibition on paid advocacy applies are discussed in the Guide to the Rules.

In all cases of doubt Members are advised to consult the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests and/or the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

Contact: Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, x1883, x0320; 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, 2009*, HC 735 of Session 2009-10, available from the Vote Office and at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cmcode.htm. Advice Notes for Members (Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards): a series of topical and procedural notes with advice for Members on particular aspects of the registration and declaration of their interests. See <http://pdvnsc.parliament.uk/PCFS/Homepage.htm>.

Ministerial statements

Oral

Oral ministerial statements are made after question time (but on Fridays, normally at 11am), and are followed by questions to the Minister on the statement. The full text is distributed in the Chamber by the doorkeepers once the Minister has sat down. Notice of some statements is given on the order paper (either in part A of Future Business, or on the summary agenda and main order paper, depending on when the information becomes available). If notice of an oral statement is given only on the day it is to be made, the information will be displayed on the annunciators at 1pm on Mondays and Tuesdays and as soon as possible on other days.

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 at the end of the order paper on the day they are to be made. (They appear first in Future Business, part F, if more notice than a day is given.) Printed copies of the statements become available in the Library and the Vote Office, usually from 9.30am, and are published the next day in Hansard (with column numbers in a separate ‘WS’ series). Notices of written ministerial statements may also be given on three days during September, and the statements themselves are made on another three days during September.

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

Northern Ireland business

General

Arrangements specific to Northern Ireland include oral questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Affairs (select) Committee and the Northern Ireland Grand Committee.

Northern Ireland Grand Committee

The Northern Ireland Grand Committee consists of all Northern Ireland Members and up to 25 others. Sittings are determined by motions in the House. There may be meetings on not more than two days a session in Northern Ireland. Meetings normally continue for three and a half hours, including a half-hour adjournment debate at the end. (For types of business, see *Grand Committees*.)

Contact: Clerk of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, x4921.

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 (see Swearing in of Members), starting with the Speaker, the Government front bench, the opposition front bench and other privy counsellors. One or two further days are usually set aside for taking the oath; thereafter Members returned in the General Election take the oath immediately after prayers on later days.

State Opening, at which the Queen's Speech is delivered, takes place after the days for taking the oath. 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 applies in each subsequent session.)

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303.

Further information: *Erskine May*, chapter 13.

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. The question taken first is ‘That the original words stand part of the question’ and, if that question is negatived the House then decides straightaway whether ‘the proposed words [in 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.

Further information: Standing Orders Nos. 14(2) and (3) and 31(2).

Order paper and Vote Bundle

Order paper

The order paper (formally entitled ‘Order of Business’) is the House’s agenda for a sitting and lists all the House’s substantive business for a particular day, including committee sittings. The first part is the summary agenda for the day which indicates those items where debate is expected to arise (in bold type). The main order paper then follows and includes 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);
- end of day adjournment debate;
- committees meeting that day and committee reports being published that day;
- written ministerial statements being made that day.

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 ('forthwith').

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).

Future business

Appended to the order paper is the Future Business paper which lists items of business of which notice has been given:

- section A: future proceedings in the House (one or two weeks);
- section B: future proceedings in Westminster Hall;
- section C (also known as 'remaining orders'): notices of Government business formally set down for that day but likely to be taken on a future day;
- section D: items of business set down for specific dates beyond the period covered by section A (mostly private Members' bills);
- section E: future proceedings in European committees;
- section F: notices of written ministerial statements for a future day (if any);
- section G: notices of public petitions for a future day (if any).

Vote bundle

The order paper is a part of the daily ‘vote bundle’. Other main items in the vote bundle 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 laid before the House (including statutory instruments);
- Notices of questions tabled on the previous sitting day. Members can check their own questions for accuracy;
- Private business (for that day and future days);
- Early day motions tabled on the previous sitting day;
- Amendments to bills tabled.

On Wednesdays when deferred divisions are to take place, the Vote Bundle includes a pink voting form. Blue pages in the Vote Bundle are used to indicate that the notices set out are provisional. All this material is available from the Vote Office as well as online via the parliamentary website under ‘Business’ in the ‘What’s On’ section.

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

Petitions

For petitions against private bills, see *Private bills*

General

Petitions to the House, also known as ‘public petitions’, must be prepared in accordance with the House’s rules concerning form and content which are available from the Journal Office. 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) with any queries. Only Members

may present petitions to the House. Petitions must first be endorsed by the Journal Office as being in order, and signed by the Member at the top of the first page above the wording of the petition. 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 petition 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 'prayer' (the concluding sentence setting out what the petitioners are requesting). No other Member may speak. At the end of the statement the Member brings the 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 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 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.

Petitions are also sent to the relevant departmental select committee, though committees have discretion as to whether to take action, and will not usually consider individual cases. It is open to Members to seek a reference, known as a ‘tag’, on the order paper referring to a presented petition as relevant to a particular debate. The agreement of the Member in charge of the relevant item of business is required to secure a tag. Tags are most likely to be sought, and agreed to, for adjournment debates in Westminster Hall where the backbench Member with the debate would be responsible for authorisation.

E-petitioning

The Procedure Committee and the House of Commons Reform Committee have expressed support for a system of internet-based ‘e-petitions’ to the House of Commons, and the previous Administration was in favour in principle. The House has not yet taken final decisions.

Contact: Clerk of Public Petitions, x3310 (content and notice of formal presentation).

Further information: *Guide to Presenting a Public Petition to the House of Commons*, available from the Journal Office; First Report from the Procedure Committee, Session 2007-08, *e-Petitions*, HC 136; Second Report from the Procedure Committee, Session 2008-09, *e-Petitions: Call for Government action*, HC493; First Report from the House of Commons Reform Committee, Session 2008-09, *Rebuilding the House*, HC 1117.

Points of order

Points of order bring supposed breaches of the House's rules of order to the Speaker's attention. They 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.

Prayers

At the beginning of a sitting

Members rise when the Speaker enters. During prayers, led by the Speaker's Chaplain, they remain standing but turn towards the wall behind them. Attending prayers also provides the opportunity to reserve a seat in the Chamber for the sitting (see *Chamber*).

Prayers against statutory instruments

The other sort of 'prayer' is a formal motion (but tabled and published in the same way as an early day motion) disapproving of a certain type of statutory instrument (see *Statutory Instruments*).

Contact: Journal Office, x3310.

Private bills

Private 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.

Bills persistently blocked are eventually set down for debate by the Chair of Ways and Means, when proceedings may continue for up to three hours. However, in some cases the aim of Members objecting to a private bill is to persuade the promoters of the bill to provide some explanation of, or change to, provisions in the bill. If and when such aims are met, objections may be withdrawn.

Parties 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 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: (i) approve the bill as drafted, (ii) insist on amendments, (iii) 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.

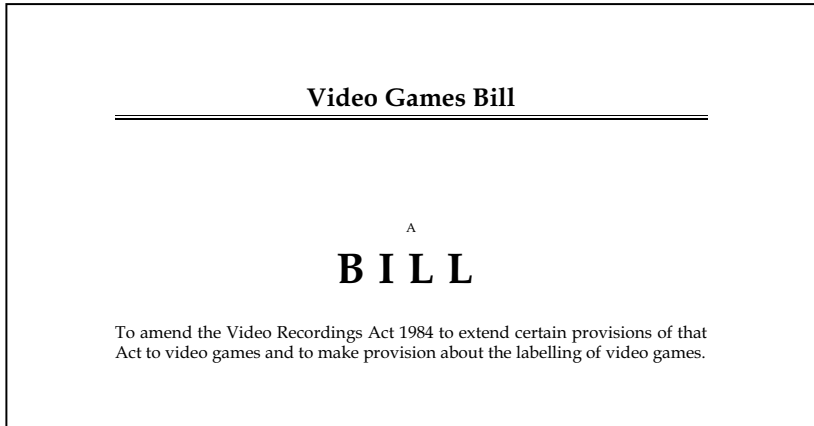
Contact: Private Bill Office, x6008.

Private Members' bills

See also *Public bills*

There are three ways for private Members to present bills: under the ballot procedure, under the ten-minute rule and by formal presentation. Bills presented as a result of the ballot have an advantage in securing time for debate. However, the other methods can provide publicity and, in the case of ten-minute rule bills, the opportunity to make a short speech in the Chamber in prime time on a subject of the Member's choosing.

To present a bill, only the short title and long title (the latter setting out the purposes 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 printed, the bill cannot proceed to second reading. Bills cannot be printed before they have been presented.



Example of a short and long title of a bill

Ballot for private Members' bills

The ballot is held on the second Thursday in each session. Members enter the ballot by signing a book placed in the No Lobby during the period when the House is sitting on the preceding Tuesday and Wednesday. Twenty names are drawn, but only the first seven are likely to secure a day's debate for second reading.

No commitment to a particular subject is required until the day before presentation, when notice must be given of the short and long titles. The bills are presented, in ballot order, on the fifth Wednesday of the session and the Member in charge of each bill gets the opportunity to name a day for second reading in turn. The Clerk of Private Members' Bills writes to the 20 successful Members following the ballot to explain the procedure.

Ten-minute rule bills

On each Tuesday and Wednesday (following presentation of the ballot bills on the fifth Wednesday of a session), one Member may move a motion for leave to introduce a bill. Notice of such a motion 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 5 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, but there are informal queuing arrangements overseen by the whips. The notice of motion must contain the bill's short and long titles, but these can be changed until five sitting days before the motion is to be made, and Members may initially table a holding title supplied by the Public Bill Office should they wish.

When the Member is called (at 3.30pm on a Tuesday or 12.30pm on a Wednesday or in either case after 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 may 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 mover ‘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, advances five paces, bows, advances five more paces, bows again, moves to the Government side of the Table and hands the dummy bill to the Clerk;
- the Clerk reads the short title, the Speaker asks ‘Second Reading what day?’ and the Member names one of the days set aside for Private Members’ bills.

Presentation

After the ballot bills have been presented on the fifth Wednesday of the session, any Member may give notice of his or her intention to present a bill on any future day. Notice must be given in writing and must 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 or Tuesday, 12 noon on a Wednesday or 11am on a Thursday). Presentation takes place at the time of preliminary business (3.30pm or later on Monday and Tuesday; 12.30pm or later on Wednesday; 11.30am 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.

- the Clerk reads the short title.
- the Speaker asks ‘Second Reading what day?’
- the Member names a day.

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 up to 11 Members as ‘supporters’, in addition to the Member in charge. Their 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 150 copies, which are available from the Vote Office.

There are usually 13 Fridays set aside for the consideration of private Members’ bills. The first seven days are usually taken up by second readings; thereafter, bills that have reached later stages than second reading have precedence, with the most advanced first (these Lords Amendments 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.

Careful organisation and tactics are needed for second reading and later stages. Advice on the procedures, and their implications, should be sought from the Clerk of Private Members’ Bills in the Public Bill Office.

A private Member’s bill may contain provisions with a financial implication, provided that they are only ancillary to the main

purpose, but 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 (the Government has undertaken in principle to facilitate such motions when necessary). 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.

Further information: Public Bill Office leaflets on the *Ballot*, *Ten-minute rule bills* and *Presentation Bills*.

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 Nos. 42-44.

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 on Standards and Privileges or that some other action be taken.

Contact: Clerk of the Journals, x3315.

Further information: *Erskine May*, chapters 5 to 11; Journal Office Leaflet on Parliamentary Privilege, &c.

Programme orders

See also *Public bills*

General

Programme orders set out a timetable for the conclusion of proceedings on a bill, and may cover all stages after second reading, including Lords Amendments. Notice must be given of a programme motion before second reading of the bill to which it relates and it may then be moved immediately after second reading. The question on it is put forthwith (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 also put forthwith; with certain exceptions listed in Standing Order No. 83A (any reduction of the time previously allowed or further provision for proceedings on report or third reading). In these cases, each such motion may be debated for up to three-quarters of an hour.

Debate

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 (it is ‘exempted business’ for the time allocated).

Procedure

When the time allocated expires, only certain questions may be put, as specified in the standing orders, usually: the question under discussion, questions on amendments moved or motions made by a Minister or on any amendment selected by the Chair for separate decision, and other questions necessary to dispose of the business.

In committee

If a programme order applies to proceedings in a public bill committee, 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 may amend.

The public bill committee may also make proposals to the House for changes in the date for reporting the Bill or in the programming of consideration and third reading.

If a programme order applies to proceedings in Committee of the whole House or on consideration and third reading, a programming

committee (consisting of the Chair of Ways and Means and up to eight Members nominated by the Speaker) may make proposals about the detailed allocation of time. The House may debate a motion containing such proposals for up to three-quarters of an hour and may amend it.

This latter provision is, however, regularly disappplied and proceedings on later stages of bills are governed by the original programme order or by a supplementary order tabled by the Government.

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 (see Standing Order No. 83). Such a motion may also be moved before the second reading of a bill, if that second reading is itself to be timetabled.

Contact: Public Bill Office, x4921.

Further information: Standing Orders Nos. 83 A to 83 I.

Public bill committees

See also *Amendments* (to bills) and *Public bills*

General

Public bill committees go through bills committed to them clause by clause and schedule by schedule, debating, and sometimes agreeing to, amendments, new clauses and new schedules. Most of them may also receive written evidence and take oral evidence on the bill from interested parties. A separate public bill committee is established for each bill considered.

Members are nominated by the Committee of Selection, and membership reflects the party composition of the House. Members are sent cards informing them of their appointment and subsequently of the dates and times of sittings (see *Selection, Committee of*). Chairs are appointed by the Speaker, and act impartially to ensure that the Committee follows the rules of the House.

Sittings

Sittings are in public (save for brief periods before witnesses are called in when oral evidence is being taken). 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 *Select committees (meetings)*). 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, which is usually the committee's first item of business.

Morning meetings on Tuesdays usually start at 10.30am and those on Thursdays at 9am. Public bill committees may not sit between 1pm and 3.30pm on Tuesdays, 11.25am and 1.30pm on Wednesdays and 10.25am and 12.30pm on Thursdays (subject to an extra 15 minutes at the end of the morning sitting if sufficient to complete consideration or to bring an evidence session to an orderly conclusion).

Oral or written notice must be given of a motion for afternoon sittings. Public bill committees on Government bills normally meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and those on private Members' bills on Wednesdays.

Order of proceedings

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

- motion to agree programme or sittings motion (if any);
- motion (if any) to vary the order in which the clauses and schedules are considered;
- oral evidence sessions (if any);
- debate on the first amendment (or group of amendments) to the first clause to be considered. The mover makes a speech; the Chair proposes the question ‘That the amendment be made’; there is a debate. Members may speak as many times as they wish. At the end of the debate, either the mover seeks leave to withdraw the amendment (which can be prevented by a single objection) or the Chair puts the question;
- once the amendments to each clause or schedule have been disposed of (or if there are no amendments), the Chair proposes the question ‘That the clause stand part of the bill’ or ‘That the schedule be the [first] schedule to the bill’. The question can be debated, unless the Chair considers there has already been adequate debate while going through the amendments;
- new clauses are dealt with after existing clauses and new schedules, after existing schedules;
- finally, the Chair puts the question ‘That I do report the bill [as amended] to the House’. This cannot be debated, but may be divided on.

Divisions

In a division in committee the doors of the room are locked one minute after a question is put and Members remain in their seats. The Clerk reads aloud the names of the Members, 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 on the website. On the day after a sitting the part of the amendment paper dealt with is republished with a note against each amendment indicating how it was disposed of. A public bill committee *Hansard* report for each sitting is available from the Vote Office. Copies of the Chair's selection list (see below) are available in the committee room.

Selection and grouping of amendments

The Chair has power of selection (see *Amendments to bills*) and may group amendments for debate, with the aim of as logical and orderly arrangement as possible which makes the best use of the committee's time. If amendments have been grouped, the debate takes place on all the amendments in a group when the first is reached. The question on the first amendment is put at the end of that debate; 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. The Chair's draft selection list, including groupings, is usually available by 5pm the day before in the Public Bill Office.

Contact: Public Bill Office, x3251, x6758 (ask to speak to the Clerk of the public bill committee you are interested in); for enquiries about membership, x4300.

Public bills

See also *Amendments* (to bills); *Committee of the whole House*; *Private Members' bills*; *Programme orders*; and *Public bill committees*

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 debate can range outside its strict scope. 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 decided without separate, or further, debate (see *Programme orders*). A few non-controversial bills are referred to committees for debate on Second Reading, and Second Reading is then taken formally (without debate) in the House.

Committee stage

Bills are automatically committed to a public bill committee (see *Public bill committees*) unless a motion is agreed to commit them, in whole or in part, to Committee of the whole House or, occasionally, a select committee (as with the Armed Forces Bill).

Consideration (or report) stage

The House as a whole has the opportunity to amend the bill. If the bill was amended in committee, it will normally have been reprinted. Only those parts of the bill which Members are seeking to amend are

debated, so there is not automatically a question put on each clause. New clauses are taken before other amendments.

The criteria for selecting amendments are more stringent than at committee stage, and amendments re-opening issues already thoroughly dealt with in committee are not usually selected for debate. There is no report stage if the bill was considered in full 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.)

General

The Public Bill List forms part of the Vote Bundle on Mondays. It is worth noting that private Members' bills are sometimes set down for days on which Government business takes precedence and therefore no time is available to debate them. 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.

Some Government bills are now published in draft and examined by joint or select committees before their formal presentation. Public bills may be carried over from the session in which they started to one further session by a motion moved by a Minister, under arrangements governed by Standing Order No. 83A.

Contact: Public Bill Office, x3251, x6758.

Further information: *HCIO Brief Guide to Making Laws*.

Questions

See also *Urgent questions; Westminster Hall; and Grand Committees*

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, subject to an overall maximum of two such questions to Ministers or other Members answering questions on a single day. 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 on a:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
For answer on a:	Thursday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday

Exceptions: (i) oral questions to the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the Advocate General, if on the rota to answer questions, must be tabled at least five days (excluding Fridays and weekends) before the date for answer; (ii) around recesses, when the Table Office issues a list of last tabling days under the Speaker's authority. (Last tabling days for question times immediately after the summer recess are near the end of the recess.)

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 his 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 question time. 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 may not ask more than one question of each department in each question time (excluding topical questions). Therefore, 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 should 'unstar' their question (convert it to written instead of oral answer) or withdraw it by informing the Table Office. A withdrawal or unstarred may be communicated to the office by any means, including by Members' staff (but then it must be followed by faxed authorisation (to x5568)).

Written

Ordinary written questions

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 limit on the number of ordinary written questions a Member may table.

Questions for answer on a named (specific) day

Members may table up to five 'named day' questions on a single 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 on a:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
For answer on a:	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 a working week of tabling. Answers are formally made to the House. They are sent directly to the Member who asked the question by the relevant department but must also be made available in the Library and delivered to Hansard for publication on the following sitting day. Answers continue to be given during recesses (provided the date for answer has passed), and special editions of *Hansard* containing answers are published during the summer recess.

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, a Member must sign the necessary authority in the Table Office. Questions may be sent electronically only from computers provided by the House, via the intranet and using the Member's Parliamentary Network login ID and password.

Questions may be tabled in the Lower Table Office from 10am on Mondays, 9.30am on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and 9am on Thursdays and (sitting) Fridays until the rising of the House; and from 11am to 3pm on non-sitting Fridays. Notices of questions handed in after half an hour after the moment of interruption (10.30pm on Monday or Tuesday, 7.30pm on Wednesday, 6.30pm on Thursday or 3pm on Friday) are treated as if they had been handed in on the next tabling day.

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.

During the summer recess provision is made in September for Members to table five named day questions on each of three tabling days, and for answers to be provided and published on one of three answering days. Details of the arrangements made appear on the order paper, and are available from the Table Office, before the Houses rises for the summer recess.

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 should be declared.

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’.

Oral and written questions may also be tabled to the House of Commons Commission, the Church Commissioners, the Public Accounts Commission and the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission (answered by Members with responsibility for representing those bodies).

Questions are sub-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.

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 imputative. The more serious the matter raised, the more solid the basis required by the Speaker;

- must not have been answered already in 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 be seeking information that is not 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 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 a card inviting them to contact the Table Office if a question received seems not to be in order. (Members can ask to be paged or contacted by email instead.) 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.

Further information: *HCI O Brief Guide to Parliamentary Questions*; Table Office Leaflet on *Parliamentary Questions and Early Day Motions*; *Erskine May*, pp. 345-53 (rules for questions).

Regional business

The Regional Affairs Committee, when established by the House, consists of 13 Members sitting for English constituencies nominated by the Committee of Selection, to consider matters relating to regional affairs in England referred to it on a motion put before the House by the Government. Any Member sitting for an English constituency may attend and speak, but not vote.

Contact: Public Bill Office, x4921.

Further information: Standing Order No. 117.

Scottish business

General

Arrangements specific to Scotland include oral questions to the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Scottish Affairs (select) Committee and the Scottish Grand Committee.

Scottish Grand Committee

The Scottish Grand Committee consists of all the Members representing Scottish constituencies. Sittings and their location are determined by motions in the House. (For types of business, see *Grand Committees*.)

Contact: Clerk of the Scottish Grand Committee, Public Bill Office, x4921.

Select committees

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). All except the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee have 11 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 (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). 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:

- the Committee on Standards and Privileges, which considers reports from the Commissioner for Standards on complaints against Members, and matters of privilege referred by the House;
- 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 (often known as the ‘scrutiny committees’);
- the Public Administration Select 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 audits performance against Government environmental targets;
- the Administration Committee, which considers the services provided by the House for Members and others;
- the Finance and Services Committee, which considers expenditure on and the administration of services for the House of Commons;
- the Members Estimate Committee, which keeps under review the House’s provisions relating to expenditure on Members, and the Committee on Members’ Allowances;
- the Procedure Committee, which considers the House’s procedures and practices;
- the Committee of Selection (see *Selection, Committee of*);
- the Liaison Committee (see below).

There is also a Joint Committee (including members of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords) on Human Rights, which considers human rights issues in the United Kingdom as well as human rights implications of bills.

From time to time there are also time-limited ad hoc joint committees set up to consider specific items of draft legislation or other matters. Examples from recent sessions include the Joint Committee on the Draft Climate Change Bill and the Joint Committee on the Draft Marine Bill.

Most of these committees operate like the departmental committees.

General

Finding out about committees' work

Every committee has its own web pages as part of the www.parliament.uk website. These pages typically 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.

Nominations for membership

Nominations for the membership of select committees are generally put to the House by the Committee of Selection. The House has recently endorsed the principle that the names considered by the Committee of Selection should follow secret ballots within the parties. Members are nominated for the duration of a Parliament. The party composition of select committees reflects that of the House.

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 for other committees is agreed by the House following discussions between parties. These Chairs are then elected by secret ballot.

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 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

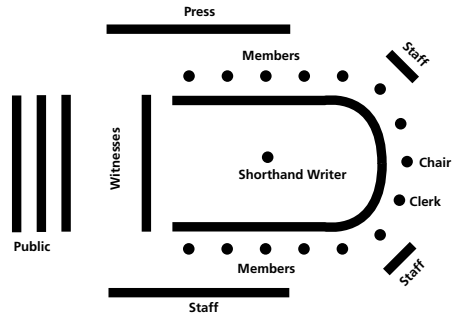
The quorum of a select committee is three, or a quarter of its members, whichever is the greater, unless standing orders provide otherwise for a particular committee. Fractions are rounded up.

Staff

Each committee is supported by a team of permanent staff drawn from the Department of Chamber and Committee Services, headed by the Committee Clerk. The staff make all the administrative



A select committee takes oral evidence



Layout of a select committee evidence session

arrangements, prepare briefing and (under guidance of the Chair) compile draft reports. Most committees have the power to appoint specialist advisers. Each committee also receives support from one of the House's Media and Communications Service media officers.

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 agreed a set of 'core tasks' for departmental committees to guide their approach to the scrutiny of Government (on the basis of a resolution of the House). The list of core tasks is set out in the committee's sessional report. 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 twice 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 on Thursday afternoon sittings in Westminster Hall or for a debate on an Estimates day on the floor of the House. The Liaison Committee decides between the various requests.

Contact: The clerk of the relevant committee (general enquiries, x4300).

Further information: *Guide for Select Committees* (available from the Committee Office, x4300); *HClO Brief Guide to Select Committees*.

Selection, Committee of

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 four other committees (see *Select Committees* section). The House has recently endorsed the principle that the names considered by the Committee of Selection should follow secret ballots within the parties. 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; appointment cards and 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 (Standing Order No. 86).

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, x4300; for other matters relating to selection, Clerk of the Committee of Selection, x3250.

Further information: *Erskine May*, pp. 740 and 789-90.

Sittings of the House

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

General

The House sits at 2.30pm on Mondays and Tuesdays, 11.30am on Wednesdays, 10.30am on Thursdays and 9.30am on Fridays. The length of a sitting depends on the business before the House; unless there is business which is ‘exempted’ by standing order or a business or programme motion, proceedings end not later than 10pm on Monday and Tuesday, 7pm on Wednesday, 6pm on Thursday and 2.30pm on Friday (not including divisions taking place to bring business to a conclusion and the half-hour adjournment debate).

On a Wednesday immediately after a recess, the Monday sitting times apply; and on the last day before a recess sitting times are often 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 Fridays on which the House sits. Other Fridays, other than those that fall within recesses, are non-sitting Fridays (sometimes known as ‘constituency 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 usually announced for a year at a time. The dates of each recess, however, are agreed to by the House on separate motions. A calendar for the session is available from the Vote Office.

Prorogation

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

Contact: Journal Office, x3316.

Standing orders

See also *Appendix B*

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 bills*).

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 (SIs)

See also *Legislative reform orders*

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, and SI texts and explanatory notes are available on the Government website www.opsi.gov.uk.

Parliamentary procedures

The two main parliamentary procedures are:

(i) 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 usually such arrangements are made.

(ii) 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:

(i) on the floor of the House, usually for 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 Monday or Tuesday, 8.30pm on Wednesday and 7.30pm on Thursday even if the 1½ hours has not expired;

(ii) 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, x3251, x6758; and for information about the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, x2830.

Further information: Public Bill Office leaflet on *Delegated Legislation and Delegated Legislation Committees*; *HCI0 Brief Guide to Delegated Legislation*.

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 Welsh, Gaelic or Cornish. Members take the oath holding in their uplifted hand the New Testament, Old Testament, Torah, Koran, Granth, Welsh Bible or Gaelic Bible. Members may also take the oath in the Scottish manner or in an older form (text in *Erskine May*).

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 main business, after questions and ministerial statements (if any). Notice of an intention to swear in should be given to the Table Office or the Speaker's 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 Public Bill 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: Table Office, x3302, x3303.

Further information: *Erskine May*, pp. 285-7, 360-1.

Urgent questions

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 noon on Monday or Tuesday, 10.30am on Wednesday, 9.30am on Thursday or 10am on 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 (which will include Ministers' views of the urgency of the matter, which is, of course, not decisive).

If the application is accepted by the Speaker, a notice is put up in the Members' Lobby and 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 under Standing Order No. 24 on the same subject on the same day.

Contact: The Speaker's Office, x5301, x5300. A leaflet on urgent questions and emergency debates is also available in the Table Office.

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 enquiries, x3631.

Welsh business

General

Arrangements specific to Wales include oral questions to the Secretary of State for Wales, the Welsh Affairs (select) Committee and the Welsh Grand Committee. The Welsh language may be used at meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales and (subject to certain conditions, including the Committee's agreement) at meetings of select committees at Westminster or in Wales, but not otherwise. The Welsh Affairs Committee may invite members of any committee of the National Assembly for Wales to attend and participate in its proceedings (but not to vote).

Welsh Grand Committee

The Welsh Grand Committee consists of all the Members representing Welsh constituencies and up to five other Members nominated by the Committee of Selection. Sittings and their location are determined by motions in the House moved by a Minister. (For types of business, see *Grand Committees*.)

Contact: Clerk of the Welsh Grand Committee, Public Bill Office, x4921.

Westminster Hall

Sittings in 'Westminster Hall' (held in the Grand Committee Room up the staircase in the north-west corner of Westminster Hall) constitute sittings of the House (effectively a parallel chamber) and any Member may take part. They are intended for uncontentious business and consist almost always of general debates arising on a motion to adjourn the sitting. They take place as follows:

- on Tuesdays from 9.30am to 2pm for adjournment debates

- proposed by individual Members. (See *Adjournment debates*);
- on Wednesdays from 9.30am to 11.30am and 2.30pm to 5pm (with extra time in the afternoon if the sitting is suspended to allow Members to vote in divisions in the House) for adjournment debates proposed by individual Members. (See *Adjournment debate*);
- on Thursdays from 2.30pm to 5.30pm (with extra time allowed in the event of divisions in the House). On six Thursdays designated by the Speaker in each session, the Liaison Committee chooses select committee reports for debate. In practice the Government makes available up to two-thirds of all Thursdays for such debates. The business is announced by the Leader of the House in the Thursday business statement in the House.

The business for sittings in Westminster Hall is listed in part B of the Future Business paper (which follows on from the order paper).

Only debates on adjournment motions have taken place in Westminster Hall. If other motions were debated, a single objection would be enough to prevent a question being decided (with such questions put subsequently in the House where they would be decided without debate). Six Members standing in their places and signifying their objection to further proceeding would be sufficient to halt business other than on adjournment motions in Westminster Hall.

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.

Questions

Provision exists for questions for oral answer to be taken in Westminster Hall covering 'cross-cutting issues' with Ministers from

more than one department providing answers; but such occasions have been rare.

Contact: Table Office, x3302, x3303.

Appendix A

Notices and deadlines

Type of Notice	Where handed in	Deadlines etc. ¹	Authority required ²
Adjournment debates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of day • Westminster Hall • Grand Committees 	Speaker's Office	7pm on Wednesday of previous week ³ 10pm on Tuesday of previous week Previous week (time given in a note published at the end of the summary agenda in previous week)	Member's signature on letter or form available from the Speaker's Office
Amendments to bills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public bill committee • Committee of the whole House and on report 	Public Bill Office (or Table Office) ⁴	Rising of the House three working days before (to be unstarred) ⁵ Rising of the House two working days before (to be unstarred) ⁵	Handed in by a Member, or a Member's representative introduced to the PBO, or bearing the signature of Member
Amendments to motions and orders of the day on the order paper	Table Office ⁴	Rising of the House on the previous sitting day	Handed in or signed by a Member
Early day motions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New motions and added names to new motions • Added names to existing motions 	Table Office	Rising of the House (for publication next sitting day) 10.30pm on Monday and Tuesday, 7.30pm on Wednesday ³ , 6.30pm on Thursday and 3pm on Friday for publication on the next sitting day (recent EDMs only) or rise of the House if earlier.	Handed in or signed by Member Member's signature on EDM or on a list of EDM numbers or an instruction given by Member in person
Emergency debates (applications for)	Speaker's Office	12noon on Monday or Tuesday, 10.30am on Wednesday ³ , 9.30am on Thursday, or as soon as possible after the urgency is known.	Signed letter from Member
Petitions (notice of formal presentation)	Journal Office	Rising of the House on the previous sitting day.	By Member in person (not by telephone or staff)

Type of Notice	Where handed in	Deadlines etc. ¹	Authority required ²
Private Members' bills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ten-minute rule • Presentation 	Public Bill Office	10am 5-15 sitting days before but in practice in accordance with informal arrangements overseen by the whips Rising of the House for the next sitting day	Written notice given in person by the Member
Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral and topical • Written • Grand Committee 	Table Office	12.30pm three days before the day of answering, excluding Fridays and weekends, (but five days before, excluding Fridays and weekends, for Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the Advocate General, including Grand Committee questions) 10.30pm on Monday or Tuesday, 7.30pm on Wednesday, ³ 6.30pm on Thursday and 3pm on Friday to count as tabled on that day ³ or rising of the House if earlier Previous week (time given in a note published at the end of the summary agenda in previous week)	Written notice handed in by a Member, bearing signature of a Member or sent electronically via the e-tabling system
Urgent Questions (applications for)	Speaker's Office	12noon on Monday or Tuesday; 10.30am on Wednesday; ³ 9.30am on Thursday; 10am on Friday	Letter signed by Member

¹ The deadline is the rising of the House when this occurs before the time stated. Some deadlines are earlier if the day for tabling or giving notice would otherwise fall during a recess. Arrangements for tabling Questions for oral, and named day written, answer in the run-up to a recess are given in a note published after the summary agenda on the order paper (and available in the Table Office) for up to a week before the start of the recess).

² In all cases notices may be given in person or in writing; although oral questions may be withdrawn or 'unstarred' (i.e. changed from oral to written) by phone and by Members' staff. The one exception is that giving notice of formal presentation of a petition on the floor of the House must be undertaken in person by a Member in the Journal Office. Faxed signatures are not accepted for any type of notice. However, since in all cases Members may sign notices on behalf of each other, a notice can be faxed or emailed to another Member to be signed and handed in. Only questions may be tabled electronically via the e-tabling system, subject to certain conditions (see *Questions*). In all cases a notice handed in by a Member in person is deemed signed by that Member.

³ Monday timings apply on a Wednesday if it is the first sitting day after a recess. The deadline for half-hour adjournment debate applications is then 10pm or the rising of the House, whichever is earlier.

⁴ On the day of second reading, amendments may be handed in only at the Table in the Chamber (after second reading). The Table Office acts as a post-box for the Public Bill Office for amendments to bills; in cases of any doubt as to which amendment Members wish to support, or the effect of any intended amendment, Members are advised to seek advice from the Public Bill Office in person.

⁵ Written questions and amendments to bills may be tabled on non-sitting Fridays between 11am and 3pm. Questions and amendments to bills may also be tabled on certain days in recesses which are announced in a note at the end of the summary agenda in advance of each recess.

Appendix B

**Summary guide to the Standing Orders
(2010 (New Parliament), HC 539)****Standing Orders**

Standing order no.	Matters covered
1 to 4	Election of the Speaker and arrangements for deputies and chairs of general committees
5 and 6	Swearing in of Members (taking oath or making affirmation)
7 to 13	Seats in the Chamber and sittings of the House and in Westminster Hall
14 to 20 and 23 to 27	Arrangement, timing and precedence of public business
21 to 22B	Arrangements for notice of parliamentary questions and of written ministerial statements
28 to 37 and 42 to 47	Rules of debate and order in the House
38 to 41A	Arrangements relating to divisions and deferred divisions
48 to 56	Arrangements for the consideration of business relating to the raising and expenditure of public money
57 to 83I	Consideration of public bills (including programme motions)
84 to 120	Rules relating to general committees, including public bill, delegated legislation and European committees and terms of reference for the Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh Grand committees and the Regional Affairs Committee

121 to 138	Arrangements relating to the work of select committees
139 to 149, 151, 152A to 152G and 152I	Terms of reference of certain select committees
150	Remit of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards
152	Terms of reference of the select committees related to Government departments
152H	Planning: national policy statements
153 to 157	Public petitions
158 to 160	Receipt of parliamentary papers, including statutory instruments
161 to 163	Arrangements in relation to the attendance of members of the public

Other rules

Resolutions of the House on: sub judice matters, the scrutiny of European business, questions to Ministers, and notice of amendments in public bill committees.

Appendix C

**Department of Chamber and Committee Services
(DCCS)**

The staff of the DCCS are employed by the House and are not civil servants. Their role is to support every aspect of the business of the House and its committees. The Clerks in the DCCS are the key advisers to Members on House business and all advice from them is provided in confidence.

Note: staff cannot always volunteer procedural advice without being asked, since in some circumstances this could amount to taking sides.

In the Chamber, Members should seek advice from the Clerks at the Table.

Office	Responsibilities	Location	Phone
Committee Office	Select committees	At end of Committee Corridor (after Room 16) and in 7 Millbank	x4300 x5324
Delegated Legislation Office	European Scrutiny Committee, Joint, and Select, Committees on Statutory Instruments and the Regulatory Reform Committee	7 Millbank	x5467 x2830
Hansard (Official Report)	Report of debates in the Chamber, Westminster Hall and general committees; publishing written statements and answers	Lower Press Gallery	x2350 x1480
Journal Office	Procedural record of activity of the House; petitions; laid papers including statutory instruments; privilege	3rd floor	x3361 x3310
Overseas Office	Relations with other parliaments; delegations to international parliamentary assemblies	End of Committee Corridor (beyond Room 16)	x3314
Private Bill Office	Private bills and other private business; Committee of Selection	3rd floor	x6008

Office	Responsibilities	Location	Phone
Public Bill Office	Public bills (including private Members' bills); public bill, European and delegated legislation committees; grand committees; divisions	3rd floor	x3251 x6758
Serjeant at Arms	Security and operational matters relating to the Chamber and committee meetings; services of the doorkeepers	Serjeant at Arms seat in the Chamber and elsewhere including Members' Lobby	x3030 x3040 x3060
Table Office	Order paper; questions; early day motions; miscellaneous procedural enquiries	Off the corridor at back of Speaker's Chair	x3302 x3303
Vote Office	Supply of parliamentary papers and other official documents	Main Office (lower ground floor of Palace, entrance opposite the cash machines) Members' Lobby, Portcullis House, 7 Millbank, Parliament Street and Norman Shaw	x3631

The telephone numbers given are for general enquiries; numbers for enquiries on specific subjects are given elsewhere in this guide.

On sitting days, the procedural offices are open from the following times in the morning until the rising of the House:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday (sitting)
Journal Office	10am	10am	9.30am	9.30am	9.30am
Private Bill Office	10am	9.30am*	9.30am*	9.30am*	9.30am
Public Bill Office	10am	9.30am*	9.30am*	9.30am*	9.30am
Table Office	10am	9.30am	9.30am	9am	9am

*or from half an hour before the first public bill committee of the day, if earlier

On non-sitting Fridays in sitting weeks, the Public Bill Office, Journal Office and Table Office are open from 11am to 3pm. On other non-sitting days (recess days) the Journal Office is open between 10am and 5pm for procedural inquiries. Certain recess days are designated ‘printing days’ (usually the last Friday before the House sits) and the Public Bill Office, Journal Office and Table Office are open from 11am to 4.30pm for enquiries and the tabling of questions and amendments.

The Vote Office’s outlets are open for the distribution of official papers on sitting days as follows:

Palace Main office	7.30am to the rise of the House or 10pm, whichever is later*†
Members’ Lobby	8am to the rise of the House
Norman Shaw North	9am to 6pm†
Portcullis House	9am to 10pm*†
Parliament Street	9am to 6pm†
7 Millbank	10am to 5pm†

*Earlier closing times apply on a Thursday

†Earlier opening and/or closing times apply on a sitting Friday

Appendix D

Other information about procedure and practice

Brief Guides: published by the House of Commons Information Office (several are noted in this guide under the relevant section). The brief guides, which are primarily aimed at informing members of the public, are available in the Members' Library and on the internet and intranet. Those most relevant to this guide are:

Making Laws

Delegated Legislation

Select Committees

Parliamentary Questions

General introductions: including Paul Evans, *Handbook of House of Commons procedure* (Dods, 2009); and Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters, *How Parliament works* (6th edition Pearson, 2006).

The authoritative guide: *Erskine May's Treatise on The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*—usually known as 'Erskine May'. References in this guide are to the 23rd edition (Butterworths, 2004).

The Parliament and Constitution Centre of the Library (Information Services Department) also holds a great deal of information about Parliament, and responds to individual queries from Members and their staff (contact x0252 or x4948). It publishes Research Papers and Standard Notes on topical issues, including developments in parliamentary procedure, available at 'Parliament and Constitution Research' under 'Research publications' on the website.

The Members' Centre, situated in the atrium of Portcullis House, will also be able to help with queries about the business of the House and where further details may best be found.