



HOUSE OF LORDS

Guide to Business



The chamber



Welcome



One of the most familiar images of the House of Lords is the State Opening of Parliament by the Queen. This is a splendid and colourful ceremonial occasion. The Queen's Speech (written by the government) sets out Parliament's working agenda for the coming parliamentary session.

But the House is not just a place where grand ceremonies take place. The House has existed as a separate chamber of Parliament since the 14th century, and is part of the oldest parliamentary democracy in the world. It is also one of the busiest, second only to the House of Commons in the number of days and hours it sits.

A major task is to examine and pass legislation. The House plays a key role in revising legislation sent from the Commons. It also initiates legislation, and so shares the burden of the legislative load. Another important function is to act as a check on government by scrutinising its activities. The House does this by asking questions, debating policy and, through its select committees, taking evidence from ministers and others.

Members of the House, collectively, have an enormous breadth of expertise and backgrounds and, individually, are characterised by independence of thought. They complement the work of the elected House of Commons, which reflects political and constituency interests and which deals with financial and public taxation issues not covered by the Lords.

This guide gives a flavour of the House's work and its contribution to Parliament and the country.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adeline Hayman". The signature is written in a cursive style.

**The Rt Hon. the Baroness Hayman
The Lord Speaker**

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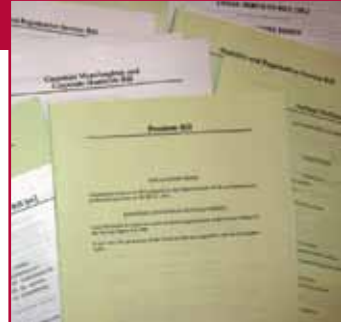
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Role of the House of Lords



It processes and revises legislation

Bills have to go through various stages in both Houses before they receive Royal Assent and become Acts. The Lords spends about two-thirds of its time in the chamber revising or initiating legislation.



It acts as a check on government

Members question the government orally or by written questions and they debate policy issues.



It provides a forum of independent expertise

Specialist committees use Members' wide-ranging expertise. The majority of committee meetings are open to the public.





The Lord Speaker presides over business in the chamber. The House of Lords is self-regulating so, unlike the Commons' Speaker, the Lord Speaker does not call the House to order. The Lord Speaker is elected by the House and is politically impartial.

The Leader of the House is the most senior member of the government in the Lords, responsible for its business in the House. The Leader also has obligations to the House as a whole: expressing its collective feelings on formal occasions and giving procedural advice, e.g. in disputes over who will speak next during questions.

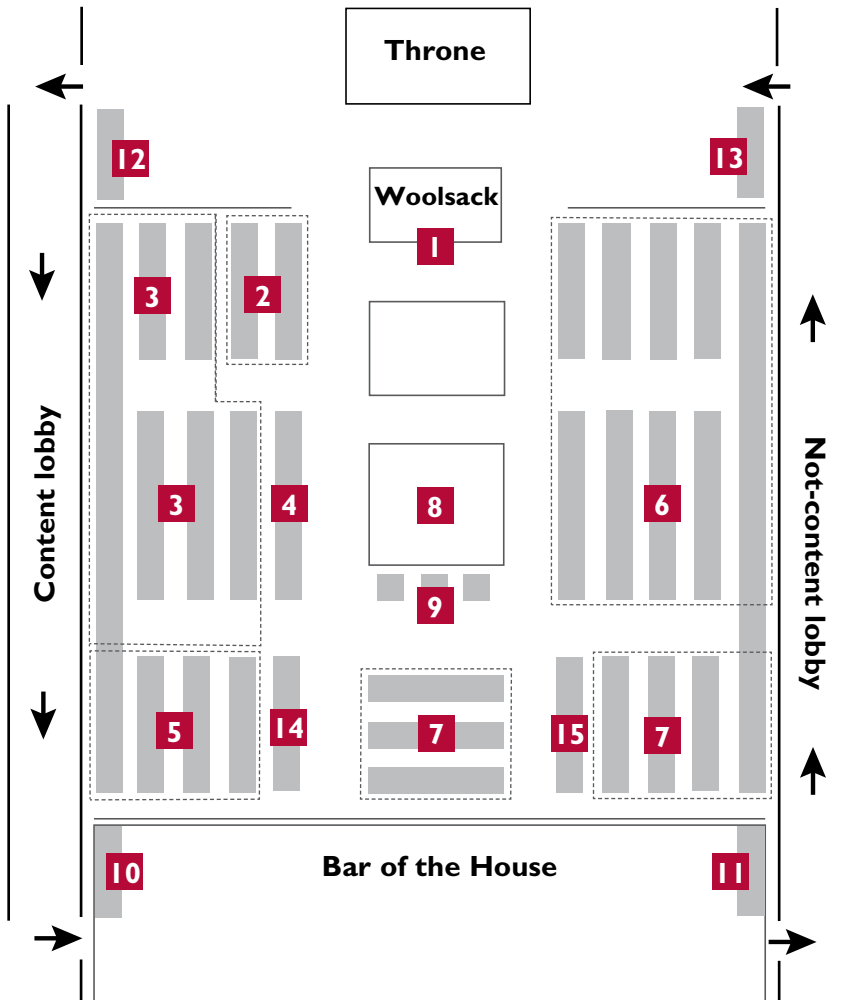


The Clerk of the Parliaments is the most senior official in the Lords, responsible for its management, administration and finances. He, or his deputy, calls on new items of business on the Order Paper.

Hansard reporters are responsible for the reporting of proceedings in the chamber and in Grand Committee. Hard copy reports are published at 7.30am the next day and are available on Parliament's website.



Who sits where



- | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Lord Speaker | 7. Crossbenchers | 13. Staff of the House |
| 2. Bishops | 8. Despatch boxes | 14. Government Privy Counsellors* |
| 3. Conservatives | 9. Clerks | 15. Opposition Privy Counsellors* |
| 4. Government ministers | 10. Hansard reporters | (* Mostly former Cabinet ministers) |
| 5. Liberal Democrats | 11. Black Rod's box | |
| 6. Labour | 12. Government officials | |

What you are likely to see if you visit the chamber

Note: Timings are intended to help visitors to the gallery understand what the House is doing at the time of their visit. Please be aware that timings and indications of business being considered are only illustrative.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday

2.30pm
(3pm on
Wednesday)

Oral questions

Parliamentary questions can elicit information from government and help members hold the government to account.

3pm
(3.30pm on
Wednesday)

Legislative business

The House discusses government proposals for new laws.

7.30pm

Short debate

For an hour at this time ('dinner break') the House may hold a short debate on a particular subject. These debates help to shape public policy.

10pm

House rises

The aim is to finish business at this time.

Thursday

11am

Oral questions (see above)

11.30am

General debates

Debates on a wide variety of subjects which can help to shape public policy are initiated by backbench Members.

7pm

House rises

The aim is to finish business at this time.

Friday

10am

Legislation

The House normally considers proposals for new laws from backbench Members.



Introductions (pictured)

Sometimes a new Member is introduced to the House before questions start. The new Member goes to the Table to take an oath.

Statements

On some days there are ministerial statements on important developments or emergencies. They are usually taken after questions or mid-afternoon but are not listed on the Order Paper.

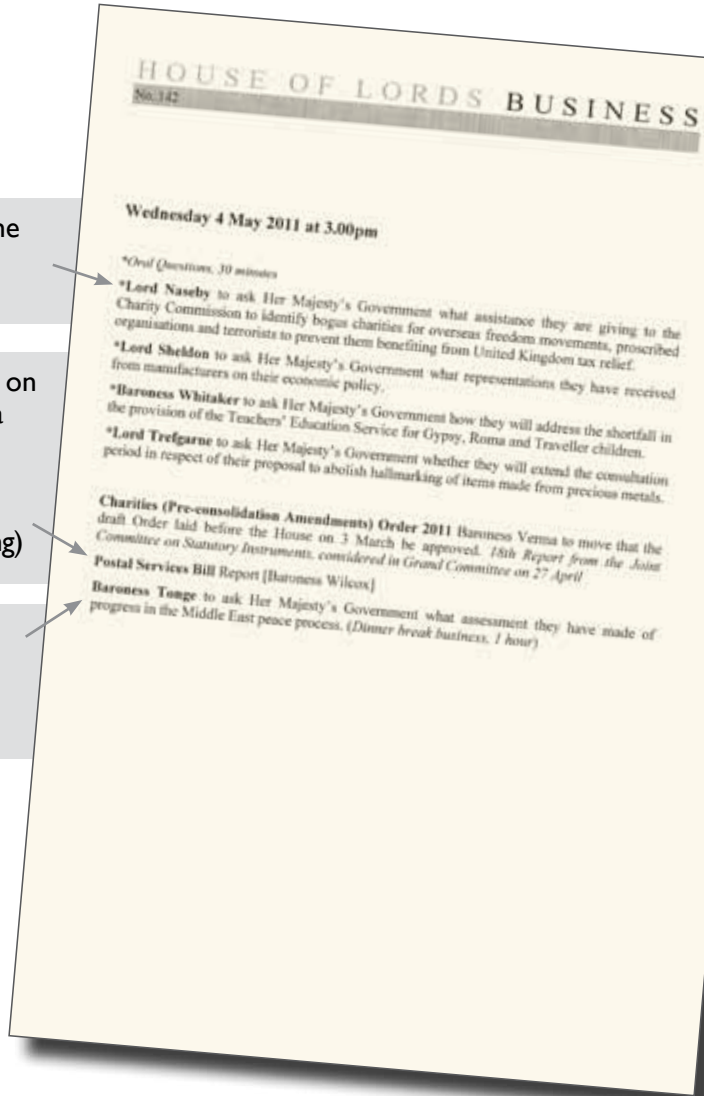
The Order Paper

Sets out details of the daily business in the chamber

Oral questions – to the government, lasting 30 minutes

Legislation – a debate on the Second Reading of a Bill or the discussion of amendments at later stages (Committee, Report and Third Reading)

Debates – on policy issues, committee reports and current concerns





Questions

Question time, at the start of business on Monday to Thursday, lasts for 30 minutes. A maximum of four questions, with supplementaries, are asked.

Questions are directed at the government as a whole, not at specific government departments on set days (as in the Commons). They enable Members to:

- check on government activities
- raise issues of concern about government policy
- seek information.

Questions are tabled in advance and printed on the Order Paper. The Member's name is read out by the Clerk of the Parliaments, and the Member then says:

My Lords, I beg leave to ask the question standing in my name on the Order Paper.

A minister or government spokesperson responds at the Despatch Box, and the questioner then asks a supplementary question on that response. This is followed by further questions from other Members.

Members also use written questions to seek information. Answers, in writing, are expected within 10 working days and are published in Hansard.



There are three main types:

- General debates (on Thursday), normally for a maximum of five hours. Sometimes there is one long debate, or there may be two shorter ones.
- Short debates, lasting 60 or 90 minutes, usually at dinner time or sometimes at the end of business.
- Debates on committee reports, which are not normally time limited.

Some of the rules and procedures vary, but all debates are an opportunity to discuss important issues and draw the government's attention to concerns.

Most debates have a list of speakers. Members do not have to 'catch the Speaker's eye' as MPs do in the Commons. Interruptions are allowed. The House of Lords is self-regulating – Members manage their own behaviour.

More than 100 debates take place over the parliamentary year on a huge range of subjects. Members have a correspondingly wide range of experience and expertise to underpin the arguments they deploy in debate.



Debates

The list of speakers

Debate: Lord Mackenzie of Framwellgate to call attention to policing and crime rates; and to move for papers. (Time limited to 2 hours)

L Mackenzie of Framwellgate

▶ **Member who tables the debate opens**

V Bridgeman

B Harris of Richmond

L Birt

5 L Wills

B Hamwee

B Warwick of Undercliffe

L Brett

▶ **Spokesperson from the opposition party group responds**

L De Mauley

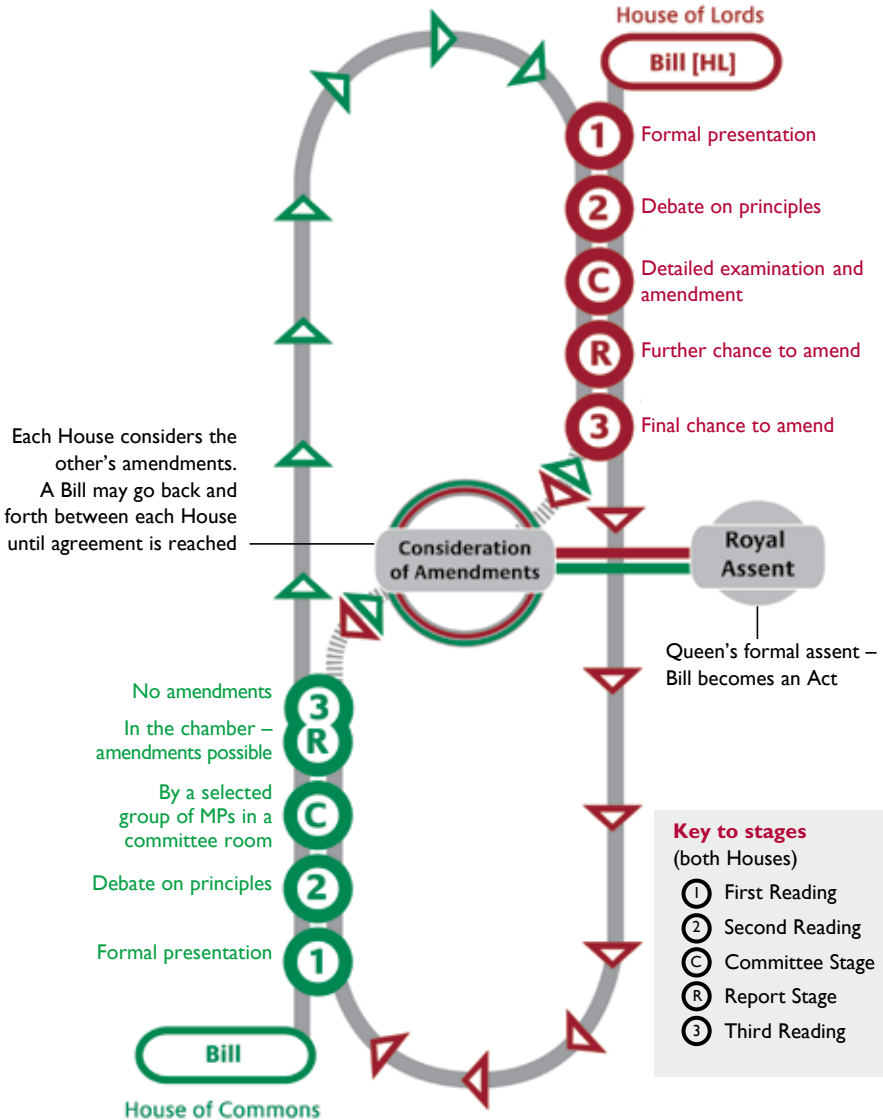
▶ **Government minister responds**

10 L Mackenzie of Framwellgate

▶ **Member who initiates the debate replies briefly**

The passage of Bills

Bills (draft laws) can start in either House. They go through the same stages but with important differences between the two Houses. Bills must be approved in the same form by both Houses before Royal Assent.



Stages of legislation in the Lords

① First Reading

- Formal presentation.
-

② Second Reading

- Debate on general principles of a Bill.

Bills are not routinely voted on at this stage.

③ Committee Stage (may be several days)

- Bills are considered in a Committee of the Whole House (in the chamber) or in a Grand Committee (away from the chamber). Any Member can attend.
- Detailed line-by-line examination and consideration of amendments.

Unlike the Commons, there is no selection of amendments — all can be considered and discussion of amendments is not time limited or ‘guillotined’.

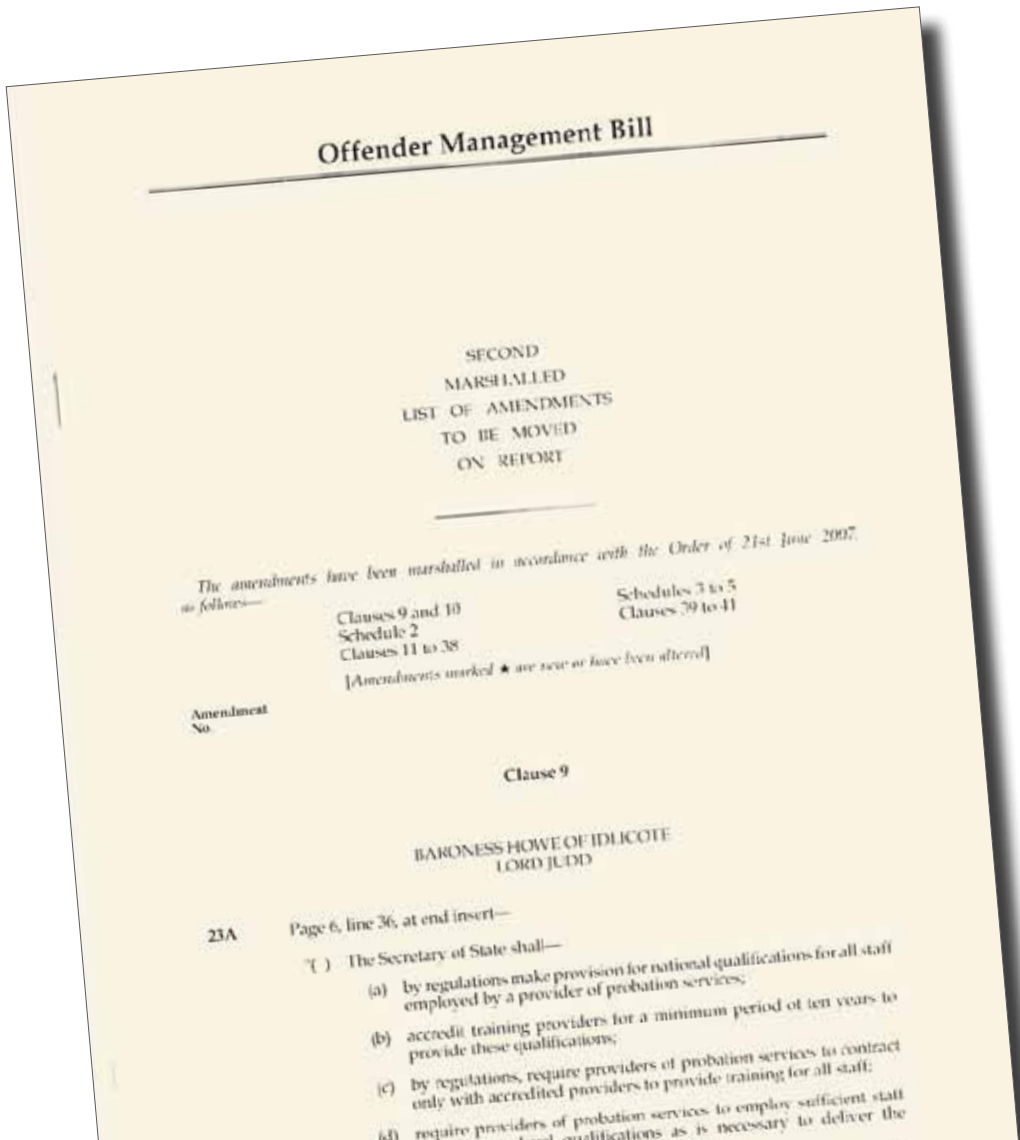
④ Report Stage (may be several days)

- Further chance to amend a Bill.
-

⑤ Third Reading

- Unlike in the Commons, ‘tidying up’ amendments can be made. Issues debated and decided at an earlier stage can’t be reopened.
- Passing: usually taken formally.

Amendments can be considered at Committee and Report Stages and at Third Reading. They are tabled before the debate and a numbered list is printed, known as a ‘marshalled list’.



Amendments – how changes are debated

Offender Management Bill: Report (Day 2)

(NB: Although every effort is made to secure agreement to these groupings, they remain informal and not binding. It is open to any Peer to speak to an amendment in its place in the Marshalled List.)

- * 23A, g24
- 25, 26 - withdrawn
- 27
- 28, 43
- 29
- g30
- g31, g39, g40, g41, g42
- 32
- 33
- 33A
- 34
- 35
- 36
- 37
- 37ZA
- 37A, 37B – already debated
- g38

Grouping of amendments

Amendments of a similar nature, or that apply to similar aspects of a Bill, are grouped together and debated together. The **grouped amendments** are set out in a list (above) in advance of a debate, e.g. amendment 23A (*) is grouped with g24 so that they will be debated together ('g' = government amendment). However, each amendment is called in turn, whether or not it has been debated previously.

1 After an amendment has been discussed, it is either withdrawn or the Member presiding puts the question:

**As many as are of that opinion will say Content.
The contrary Not-content.**

- If there is disagreement, the presiding Member says **Clear the Bar** to indicate the start of a vote.
- After three minutes the question (above) is repeated.
- Members shout **Content** or **Not-content**.
- The presiding Member announces:

**The Contents will go to the right by the Throne.
The Not-contents to the left by the Bar.**

2 Members who support the amendment go through the Content lobby; Members who are against the amendment go through the Not-content lobby (see diagram on page 3).

- Tellers from each side and clerks go into each lobby to count and record (right) Members voting as they walk through.
- Tellers report the results to the clerk at the table.



3 The clerk hands the result to a teller from the winning side.

4 The teller passes it to the presiding Member to announce the result:

5 **There have voted: Content [number], Not-content [number], and so the Contents [or Not-contents] have it.**

Voting



1



2



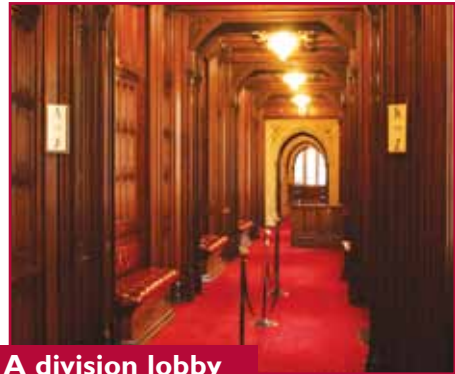
3



4



5



A division lobby

Committees conduct wide-ranging investigations into policy issues and other governmental decisions. At committee inquiries, members hear evidence from ministers, experts and relevant organisations. All committees are cross-party and benefit from the specialist knowledge and professional expertise which characterises the membership of the House of Lords. This allows an independent approach to the scrutiny of public policy.

Committee inquiries are public and most committee meetings are open to the public. Committees normally meet weekly (even when not holding inquiries) usually in the mornings on the Committee Corridor.

The permanent House of Lords committees

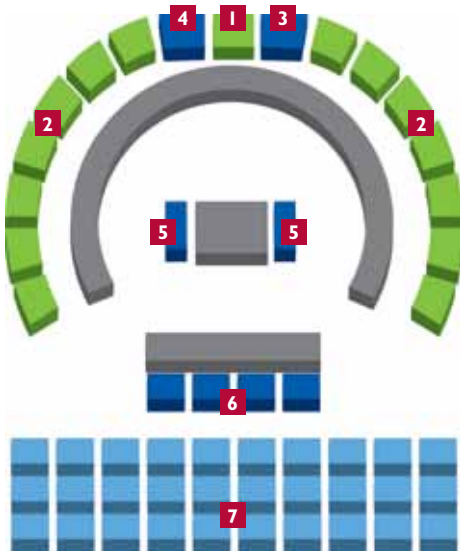
- European Union Committee
- Science and Technology Committee
- Constitution Committee
- Economic Affairs Committee
- Communications Committee

One-off committees are sometimes set up to look at subjects outside the permanent committees.

Committees – how they work

- A committee decides the subject of inquiry.
- A ‘call for evidence’ is issued, inviting written submissions.
- A series of public meetings is held to hear oral evidence.
- If necessary, a committee will visit relevant places and organisations.
- Following deliberations, committee staff draft a report for its chairman based on the evidence.
- A chairman’s draft report is considered and agreed by a committee.
- The report is published.
- The report may be debated in the House at a later date.
- Committees also correspond with government ministers and may revisit issues to assess the impact of their recommendations.

A committee meeting – who sits where



1. Chairman
2. Members
3. Clerk
4. Specialist adviser
5. Transcribers
6. Witnesses
7. Public seating



Currently, there are about 830 Members of the House of Lords. The majority (about 700) are life Peers. Others include 26 archbishops and bishops and 92 hereditary Peers. There is no upper limit on the total number of Members. Numbers in each of the party and Crossbench groups fluctuate. Up-to-date figures can be found on the Parliament website.

Members work on behalf of the people of the UK. Most are not paid salaries, but can claim allowances for attending sittings of the House or committee meetings.

Members of the House of Lords are organised on a party basis in much the same way as the House of Commons, but with important differences: Members of the Lords do not represent constituencies and many do not support any political party – these independent Members are known as ‘Crossbenchers’. Members sit in the chamber according to the party or group they belong to (see diagram on page 3).

The government and the main opposition party or parties each have a leader, whips who organise the business of the House and departmental spokesmen who sit on the frontbench. The Crossbenchers have a convenor but no whip system. Their independence is a distinctive feature of the House of Lords.



Keeping order

The House of Lords is self-regulating. Keeping order is the responsibility of the House itself, i.e. all the Members present. Any Member may draw attention to breaches of order.

The Lord Speaker presides over business in the chamber and can offer advice but, unlike the Speaker of the House of Commons, has no power to control proceedings and cannot decide who will speak next: the practice of ‘catching the Speaker’s eye’ in the House of Commons has no equivalent in the House of Lords.

The House of Lords generally conducts business in a calm and courteous manner. If a dispute does arise about who will speak, there may be a chorus of ‘order, order’ from Members all around the chamber and Members will usually sit down to allow another to speak. During question time, the Leader may assist the House by suggesting whose turn it may be.



Further information



Find out more after your visit – parliamentary resources online:

- www.parliament.uk/lords
provides details of daily and future business in the House, the progress of Bills, membership and committee work.
- www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/pahansard.htm
takes you to Hansard – the official report of proceedings. Daily debates are published on this website the next working day.
- www.parliamentlive.tv
is Parliament’s video and audio site, carrying live and archived coverage of debates and committee proceedings in both Houses.
- www.parliament.uk/education
provides learning materials and activities.
- www.lordswhips.org.uk
is the Government Whips Office website. Visit it for lists of speakers and groupings of amendments.

House of Lords enquiry service – for general enquiries

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