



Factsheet P12 Procedure Series

Revised February 2007

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House of Commons Information Office

House of Commons Papers

House of Commons Papers are one of five main classes of parliamentary papers; the others are House of Commons Bills, Command Papers (**Factsheet P13**), House of Lords Papers and House of Lords Bills. They are papers which result from the work of the House and its Committees or are otherwise necessary for its work. They include select committee papers, minutes of proceedings of public bill committees, estimates and appropriation accounts and other categories described in more detail in the main text.

This Factsheet explains what House of Commons Papers include, their scope and content, numbering and indexing and some history.

This Factsheet is available on the Internet through:
<http://www.parliament.uk/factsheets>

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House of Commons Papers

House of Commons Papers form a distinct series within the parliamentary papers collection. Each paper in the series is identified by a number with the prefix 'HC' and the session in which it has been published. While the series is mainly comprised of documents which result from the work of the House and its Committees, it does not include the day to day business papers which appear in the Vote Bundle – (see **Factsheet P16**).

The main categories of papers currently included are: -

- Select Committee Papers
 - Reports of Select Committees
 - Evidence taken by Select Committees
 - Minutes of Proceedings of Select Committees(Government replies to their reports may appear as Special Reports of the Committee concerned)
- Minutes of Proceedings of Public Bill (formerly Standing) Committees
- Returns to Addresses by the House
- Estimates and Appropriation etc. Accounts
- Certain Annual and other Reports and/or Accounts required by Statute be laid before the House
- House Returns

Select Committee Papers

Select Committee enquiries

House of Commons select committees usually conduct inquiries on topics of their choosing on which they call for written memoranda, and take oral evidence (commonly in public). The public oral evidence on each subject (the "Minutes of Evidence") is published in the House of Commons Papers series.

The first day's evidence of an enquiry will be given a House of Commons Paper number when it is published. For example, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee looked at the Wembley National Stadium Project in the 2001-02 session. Its first evidence session was published as HC 843-i of 2001-02 with the two subsequent sessions published as 843-ii and 843-iii. When the report was published it was in two volumes with the report numbered 843-I and the Minutes of Evidence and Appendices numbered 843-II. If an enquiry spans more than one session, the evidence will get a new Paper number for the new session and will begin again from 'i'.

Select Committee evidence

Select committees generally reprint all of the evidence taken in public in their reports as well as many of the memoranda submitted. It is therefore unnecessary to refer to the serial parts of evidence once the report is published. There are, of course, times when a committee may take evidence and never publish a report, or may present a report without having taken evidence, although this is rare. Usually a report made without evidence will be a Special Report (also published in the HC Papers series).

Users of select committee reports should note that not all memoranda submitted to committees are printed with reports. Such papers are generally listed in the reports and are available to Members as "Unprinted" papers in the House of Commons Library (see **Factsheet P15**), and to

the public in the Parliamentary Archives (formerly known as the House of Lords Record Office).

Minutes of proceedings

Select committees print their Minutes of Proceedings once every session. These are the procedural records of the session and record the names of witnesses examined and the dates and proceedings of each meeting. Consideration of draft reports and their adoption or amendment are recorded as part of the Minutes of Proceedings incorporated in each individual report.

Government replies

Government responses to select committee reports have in the past often appeared as Command Papers, but nowadays they are frequently Special Reports of the committee concerned and therefore categorised as House of Commons Papers. It has also been known for Government replies to emerge in a debate, as a reply to a parliamentary question or as a departmentally published item.

Citation of Select Committee Reports and evidence

Examples of recent select committee reports and the correct way to reference them are given below:

Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, *Wembley National Stadium Project: Into Injury Time*, 10 July 2002, HC 843-I 2001-02

Transport, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee, *Road Traffic Speed*, 13 February 2002, HC 557-ii 2001-02, evidence

Public Bill Committee Papers

The House of Commons uses public bill committees to undertake the committee stage of bills, and uses other general committees to debate delegated legislation and proposals for European legislation and other European Union documents. General committees, which until 15 Nov 2006 were known as *Standing Committees*, are also occasionally the stage for second reading and report stages of Bills and the “grand committees” for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland debate matters of interest to those countries.

The Minutes of Proceedings for all General Committees appear as HC Papers, usually some time after the sittings concerned. These record amendments moved, divisions, attendance, etc. For many practical purposes **Public Bill Committee Proceedings** (part of the Vote Bundle) or **Public Bill Committee Debates** will be more useful (see **Factsheet L6**).

Returns to Addresses

Returns to addresses are often a way for the Government to make available to the House a report or statistics from the Government. However, they occur infrequently. The return of candidates' election expenses after a general election was such a paper although from the 2001 election it has been published by the Electoral Commission. Printing a paper as a return to an address might be used as a means of obtaining the explicit protection afforded by the *Parliamentary Papers Act 1840* against possible libel actions.

Estimates and Accounts

There are various estimates and accounts that are published as House of Commons Papers:

- The main Supply Estimates, Revised and Supplementary Estimates and Appropriation Accounts presented to the Commons appear as House of Commons Papers.
- Other Government accounts relating to the National Loans Fund and Trading Funds.
- The **Financial Statement and Budget Report** is a House of Commons Paper, but the **Pre-Budget Report** is a Command Paper
- Since 1983 reports by the Comptroller and Auditor General / National Audit Office have also been House of Commons Papers.

For more details see **Factsheets** P5 and P6 on Financial Procedure and the Budget.

Annual Reports and Accounts

The largest single component of the HC Papers series in the late 1960s was the annual reports and accounts of various organisations (mainly the nationalised industries together with various other autonomous bodies). This range of material was considerably reduced when the House of Commons (Services) Select Committee agreed on 22 February 1972 to allow nationalised industries to issue their annual reports outside the HC Papers series. However, they agreed that reports should still be presented to Parliament as non-Parliamentary Papers. Many of these were published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO – now The Stationery Office), although often the body published them itself.

There are still organisations that publish their annual reports in the HC Papers series. Also some other bodies continue to publish their accounts as HC Papers but annual reports (which are more detailed but may include the accounts) are published by the bodies themselves.

House returns

From 1987-88 onwards, all House returns have been published as a single House of Commons Paper for each session known as the *Sessional Returns*. These summarise the work of the House within each session with information on sitting times, use of procedural instruments and the work of select committees.

Previously, the sessional returns of Public Bills, Select Committees and General Committees were published as separate House of Commons Papers. Other returns relating to sittings, use of the closure, private bills and other matters were unpublished (although the House of Commons Information Office can make information available from the typescripts, or they may be consulted at the Parliamentary Archives)

Other papers

The following papers are published as House of Commons papers, but do not fall into any particular category:

- The *Register of Members' Interests*
- The sessional and decennial indexes to Parliamentary Papers.
- House of Commons *Standing Orders* (for both public and private business)

- Reports of the Health Service, Legal Services and Parliamentary Ombudsmen.

Numbering and Indexing

House of Commons Papers are numbered up from 1 in every parliamentary session. It is therefore necessary to refer to a paper by number and session, e.g. HC 507 2005-06

The Votes and Proceedings Desk in the Journal Office of the House of Commons allocates the numbers.

House of Commons Papers are listed and indexed sessionally together with House of Commons Bills and Command Papers in the *Parliamentary Papers Sessional Index*, which forms the final volume in each session's set of papers. There is a special index to Papers of the eighteenth century: thereafter, various indexes exist:

- Three indexes covering 1801 to 1850.
- Semi-centennial (half-century) indexes - 1852-1899 and 1900-1949.
- Decennial (ten years) indexes for the sessions between 1950-59, 1960-69 and 1970-79.
- A numerical list of all House of Commons Papers also appears in each year's *Stationery Office Catalogue*.

All House of Commons Papers from October 1980 to date are indexed in the House of Commons Library parliamentary database (PIMS) and the House of Commons Information Office can access information on an enquirer's behalf. Information from 1997 onwards is available to the public on the internet at: www.polis.parliament.uk. POLIS is also available on subscription on the *Parliantet* database through Context Ltd (020 7267 8989).

Access to House of Commons Papers

Many House of Commons Papers are now available on the parliamentary web site at:

<http://www.parliament.uk>

and then click on *Publications and Records*

From here you should have access to all select committee reports from the beginning of the 1997-98 session, and from April 1998 minutes of evidence on new enquiries have also been added. Since the beginning of the 1999-2000 session, uncorrected transcripts of evidence from ministers have also become available the day after the evidence session.

Also available on the Parliament website are the Standing Orders, the Sessional Returns (from 1997-98) and the Register of Members' Interests (all under 'Commons Publications').

The Stationery Office website makes available the full texts of some of those House of Commons Papers which originate in government departments:

<http://www.official-documents.co.uk/menu/browseDocuments.htm>

Hard copies of the papers can be purchased through the Stationery Office or the Parliamentary Bookshop (see contact information at the end of Factsheet). Also many local libraries hold sets of House of Commons Papers; the House of Commons Information Office can advise enquirers on this. Alternatively, they can be consulted at the Parliamentary Archives.

Further Reading

A Guide to Parliamentary Papers
P and G Ford
Irish University Press
1972

Contact information

House of Commons Information Office
House of Commons
London SW1A 2TT
Phone 020 7219 4272
Fax 020 7219 5839
hcinfo@parliament.uk
www.parliament.uk

House of Lords Information Office
House of Lords
London SW1A 0PW
Phone 020 7219 3107
Fax 020 7219 0620
hlinfo@parliament.uk

Parliamentary Archives
(formerly the House of Lords Record Office)
London SW1A 0PW
Phone 020 7219 3074
Fax 020 7219 2570
archives@parliament.uk

Parliamentary Bookshop
12 Bridge Street
Parliament Square
London SW1A 2JX
Phone 020 7219 3890
Fax 020 7219 3866
bookshop@parliament.uk

The Stationery Office
PO Box 29
Norwich NR3 1GN
Phone: 0870 600 5522
Fax: 0870 600 5533
E-mail: esupport@tso.co.uk
www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Factsheet P12 House of Commons Papers

It would help greatly to ensure that Factsheets fulfil their purpose if users would fill in and return this brief pre-addressed questionnaire, or email a response. Negative responses can be as useful as positive.

For your purposes, did you find this Factsheet

- | | | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Very useful | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fairly useful | <input type="checkbox"/> | Not much use | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Too long | <input type="checkbox"/> | The right length | <input type="checkbox"/> | Too short | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Clear | <input type="checkbox"/> | Not always clear | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rather unclear | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Any comments?

Please write to:
Head of Section
House of Commons Information Office
London SW1A 2TT

If you prefer, please email to:
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Name

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