

Information for witnesses appearing before Select Committees of the House of Lords

LOCATION

Committee Corridor

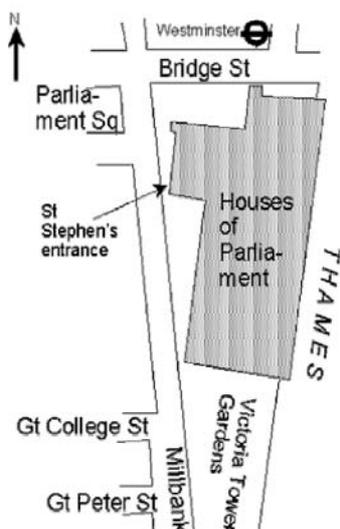
Oral evidence hearings usually take place in a Committee Room within the Houses of Parliament. The Clerk or Secretary will write to you before the meeting to confirm the time and room number. You should make your way to the Committee Room for the allotted time.

How to get there

The Houses of Parliament are in Westminster in central London. You can either take an underground to Westminster station, which is on Jubilee, District and Circle lines or take a bus to Parliament Street (3, 11, 12, 24, 53, 88, 109, 159, 211).

Entering Parliament

You should enter Parliament via black security building outside the St Stephen's entrance. This is the public entrance situated in the middle of the building. Please present yourself to the Visitor Assistants, explaining that you are a witness to a Committee. You will then be asked to pass through security. It is best to allow 10 minutes for this. You can bypass the members of the public who are queuing to watch the debates in the two Houses. After security checks, you will be shown through St Stephen's Hall, Central Lobby and the Lower Waiting Hall and upstairs to the Upper Waiting Hall. At the statue of Joseph Chamberlain turn right and this is the Committee corridor. All room numbers are clearly displayed.



Special Needs

If you have any special requirements, such as wheelchair access, please discuss these with the Clerk or Secretary in advance of the meeting.

PROCEDURE

Before the meeting

When you arrive at the Committee Room you should wait outside in the Committee Corridor as most Committees have short private deliberations before the evidence sessions start. (It is usual for the Clerk or the Secretary to come and check whether you have any questions before the meeting.)

When the Committee is ready the Chairman, Clerk or Secretary will come out and will show you to your seat and indicate where you can place coats and bags.

You may be asked to give evidence alongside other organisations or individuals, but if this is the case, you will be made aware of this prior to the meeting.

Beginning of the meeting

Once you are seated, the Chairman will formally welcome you and any other witnesses and ask you to introduce yourself. You may also be invited to make an opening statement, should you wish to. This should be kept brief (less than two minutes).

Questions

The meeting then proceeds with the Chairman and Members of the Committee asking questions.

Approximately one week before the meeting you can normally expect to receive from the Clerk a list of questions which provide a framework for the evidence session. They are prepared by Committee staff for the Chairman and other Members of the Committee for guidance and there is no guarantee that they will use them or follow the order in which they appear.

Members may not ask all the questions on the list and they may add others; the list is intended only to give an indication of the areas that may be covered.

Members and witnesses speak through the Chairman, who is referred to as “My Lord Chairman”. This includes women Chairmen. It is preferable to keep answers short and succinct. Except by prior arrangement with the Clerk, you should avoid use handouts or slides as these can pose difficulties for the transcription of the evidence (see below). You should avoid relying too heavily on prepared answers, although you may refer to notes.

Please speak clearly, as the acoustics of many committee rooms are poor.

Declaration of Interests

You should be sent a list of Members’ Interests relevant to the inquiry prior to the meeting. Members may also declare any relevant interests when speaking for the first time in the public meeting. (Members’ interests are outlined in the Register which is available at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldreg.htm.)

Votes

If the House of Lords is sitting at the time of the Committee meeting (Monday—Wednesday afternoons and Thursday from 11 am) it is possible that there will be a vote. A bell will ring if there is a vote and the Chairman will briefly adjourn the meeting in order to allow Members to go and record their votes.

Length of meeting

Oral evidence sessions vary in length but generally last between 40 and 90 minutes. The Clerk should be able to give you an indication before the meeting.

At the end of the meeting, the Chairman will thank you on behalf of the Committee and the Clerk or Secretary will show you out of the room. Committees often have a short deliberative session after a public meeting to reflect on what has been heard.

Recording the meeting

A full transcript of the meeting will be taken. Most Committees now place an uncorrected transcript on the website. You will have an opportunity to make minor corrections before the transcript is printed.

An audio recording is taken at most meetings. Audio recordings are made available on www.parliamentlive.tv until around two weeks after the meeting.

An audio-visual recording is taken at a small number of meetings, for TV or web broadcasting. The Committee staff will usually have little advance warning of this, but will pass on any information they have promptly.

FACILITIES

You will find lavatories half way along the Lords Committee corridor, up a ramp. There is also a water fountain outside the lavatories. Water is provided in the meeting.

You can use the Jubilee Café, which is situated just off the North end of Westminster Hall. When you come in St Stephen's Entrance you are at the South end of Westminster Hall.

A telephone is situated in the Committee Corridor. Please dial 9 for an outside line.

FOLLOWING THE INQUIRY

The Parliament website (www.parliament.uk) has links to each of the Committees, where you will find lists of forthcoming meetings. Transcripts of oral evidence meetings are also posted here as are any press notices. Audio (and some audio-visual) recordings of meetings are available on www.parliamentlive.tv

Alternatively, you can ask to receive a copy of the Weekly Agenda which outlines the future meetings of all the House of Lords investigative Committees. Please contact James Wasley on (020) 7219 2940; wasleyj@parliament.uk

People you can expect to see in Committee meetings

Members: All Members of the Committee are Members of the House of Lords. They are appointed by the House each Session to serve on that particular Committee. Some Committees also have the power to co-opt other Peers on to a Committee for the duration of an inquiry. Any Member can ask questions of witnesses. Members sit around the horseshoe table (see diagram of Committee Room). Any other Peers who are not Members of the Committee can attend and also ask questions but they may not enter into deliberation nor may they vote.

Chairman: One Member of the Committee is appointed by the House as the Chairman. Members of the Committee ask questions through the Chairman, who is referred to as “My Lord Chairman”; witnesses normally do likewise with their answers. The Chairman sits at the head of the horseshoe table.

Clerk: A member of staff of the House of Lords who heads the Committee secretariat. The Clerk is responsible for administering the inquiry, providing procedural advice to the Committee as necessary, preparing briefing for the Committee and helping the Chairman to draft the reports. Clerks sit at the table next to the Chairman, but they do not speak during public evidence sessions.

Specialist Adviser: For most Committee inquiries the Committee appoints one or more Specialist Advisers. These are experts in the field of the inquiry who provide independent advice to the Committee about policy relevant to the inquiry. They will often be involved in helping the Chairman draft and review the Report. These Advisers also sit at the table with the Committee but do not speak during the evidence session.

Legal Adviser/Legal Assistant: Members of staff of the House of Lords who provide expert legal advice to the Committee. Like the Clerks, they sit at the table next to the Chairman, but they do not speak during public evidence sessions. They only participate in inquiries that raise legal issues.

Secretary/Committee Assistant/Committee Specialist: Staff who provide secretarial and research support to the Clerk and the Committee. They normally sit at a side-table, behind the Committee.

Shorthand Writers: They produce the verbatim report of the evidence session. They sit in the centre of the horseshoe.

House of Lords Committee Room

