



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Giving evidence to a Public Bill Committee – a guide



Giving evidence to a Public Bill Committee – a guide

This leaflet is a guide for those intending to submit written evidence to a Public Bill Committee or who have been invited to appear as a witness to such a Committee. It is produced by the Scrutiny Unit, a section of the House of Commons and not the Government, which is responsible for co-ordinating the evidence-taking of Public Bill Committees.

What are Public Bill Committees?

After the second reading of a Bill, it will usually be referred to a Public Bill Committee for further scrutiny.

Committees are named after the relevant Bill e.g. the Equality Bill Committee. This makes it clear that the Committee is established purely to consider a particular Bill.

The membership of the Committee is usually published on the Thursday after the second reading debate.

Which Bills are likely to take evidence?

Since 2006 all Public Bill Committees have had the power to receive written evidence from outside organisations and members of the public, and to take oral evidence from interested parties, in the same way as Select Committees do, as part of their consideration of the Bill.

In practice this power has been used for Government Bills only. If a Bill starts in the Lords, the Committee will not usually take oral evidence. Evidence is also not usually taken for finance Bills.

When can written evidence be submitted?

Written submissions can be accepted after the second reading debate on the Bill. The sooner you send in your submission, the more time the Committee will have to take it into consideration. Once the Committee has sat for the last time no more evidence can be received. If you are in doubt about the timing of your submission, please contact the Scrutiny Unit. Your submission will be circulated to Committee Members as soon as the Committee is nominated.

What should written evidence cover?

Your submission should address matters contained within the Bill and concentrate on issues where you have a special interest or expertise, and factual information of which you would like the Committee to be aware. It is helpful if the submission includes a brief introduction about you or your organisation. The submission should not have been previously published or circulated elsewhere. If you have any concerns about your submission, please contact the Scrutiny Unit (details below).

How should written evidence be submitted?

Your submission should be emailed to scrutiny@parliament.uk. Please note that submissions sent to the Government department in charge of the Bill will not be treated as evidence to the Public Bill Committee.

Submissions should be in the form of a Word document. A summary should be provided. Paragraphs should be numbered, but there should be no page numbering. Essential statistics or

further details can be added as annexes, which should also be numbered. To make publication easier, please avoid the use of coloured graphs, complex diagrams or pictures. As a guideline, submissions should not exceed 3,000 words. You should also include a separate covering email containing the name, address, telephone number and email address of the person responsible for the submission. The submission should be dated.

What will happen to my evidence?

The written evidence will be circulated to all Committee Members to inform their consideration of the Bill. Most submission will be published. They will be posted on the internet as soon as possible after the Committee has started sitting, and will also be printed in hard copy at the end of the Committee's deliberations.

How are the witnesses for the oral evidence sessions decided?

The Government proposes the timetable of witnesses for the oral evidence sessions after consulting the Opposition. This timetable is then considered by the Programming Sub-Committee (consisting of the Chair and seven members of the Public Bill Committee) when it meets to agree the programme of Committee sittings a few days after the second reading debate on the Bill.

At the first meeting of the Public Bill Committee the Minister formally proposes the Sub-Committee's resolution to the Committee. Whilst it is theoretically possible for the Committee to amend this programme resolution, in practice the Committee will start hearing from the

firstwitnesses only minutes after agreeing that they will be invited. This practical consideration makes it extremely rare for Public Bill Committees to make any changes to resolutions made by their Programming Sub-Committees in relation to witness programmes.

What happens in oral evidence sessions?

Oral evidence sessions are intended to enable organisations and individuals to make their views known to the Committee considering the Bill. When you are giving evidence, you will sit at a table and respond to questions from the Committee who are sitting round a horseshoe-shaped table.

The Committee Members, which include Ministers from the relevant Department, will be directed by the Chairman and can ask questions about any aspect of the Bill. The Chairman will ensure discussions always remain within the scope of the Bill.

What happens before the meeting?

You will be met outside the Committee Room by a member of the Scrutiny Unit staff, and they will direct you to your place, or tell you when you are likely to be called. You can wait outside the room or sit in the Public Gallery and listen to the evidence given by other witnesses.

If you would like any further information about the meeting or have any special requirements, please contact the Scrutiny Unit on 020 7219 8387.

Can I claim for my expenses?

If you wish to claim for any expenses, you should discuss these with us in advance of your appearance before the committee. We will provide you with a claim form and agree which expenses will be covered.

What record is kept of the meeting?

A record of the meeting will be taken by the House of Commons Official Report (Hansard), and will be available on the Parliamentary website the following day. If you feel after the session that you may have given incorrect information, for example a date or figure, then you should contact the Scrutiny Unit immediately with the correct information. You may be asked to clarify words or spellings for Hansard staff.

Please note that the meeting will be transmitted live on the internet and may also be recorded for future use by broadcasters.

What happens next?

After the Committee has taken oral evidence, it goes through the Bill, debating each clause and any amendments proposed to the text. Once the Committee has gone through the Bill, it reports the Bill – in its amended form, if changes have been made, back to the House.

Further information

The Scrutiny Unit can help with any queries about oral evidence or written evidence.

Contact details are as follows:

Telephone: 020 7219 8383/8387

Email: scrutiny@parliament.uk

Fax: 020 7219 8381

Post: Gosia McBride, Deputy Head

(Legislation),

Scrutiny Unit, 7 Millbank, London SW1P

3JA.

