

# Next steps for the Modernisation Committee following the Call for Views

## Overview of the call for views

Between 17 October and 18 December 2024, the Modernisation Committee conducted a call for views exercise, asking for ideas under its three strategic aims of driving up standards, improving culture and working practices, and reforming procedures to make the House of Commons more effective. It did so through a variety of routes:

- Written evidence (open to everyone)
- A confidential online form (for internal parliamentary stakeholders)
- Engagement events and meetings (for internal parliamentary stakeholders)

In total, it heard from more than 700 people. The committee is grateful to everyone who took part and shared their views.

Typically, select committees seeking evidence tend to do so with specific terms of reference and a relatively narrow topic in mind. The Modernisation Committee was established to consider reforms to House of Commons procedures, standards, and working practices. It is, in some ways, an unusual select committee due to its focus on reform of the House of Commons itself, and it has proceeded in an accordingly innovative way by seeking views across the full range of its remit.

Overall, the committee received nearly 400 pieces of written evidence. It heard from members of the public, former and current MPs, MPs' staff, former and current parliamentary staff, and individual academics, writers and journalists. The committee also heard from a wide range of organisations.

The committee received nearly 270 responses to its confidential online form for internal stakeholders and held six internal engagement events. In addition, it held meetings with the trade unions and with representatives from the smaller political parties, including the Democratic Unionist Party, the Green Party, Plaid Cymru, Reform UK, the Scottish National Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, Traditional Unionist Voice, and the Ulster Unionist Party.

Given the large number of responses and the breadth of the call for views, it is not surprising that a wide variety of topics emerged. This memorandum identifies some key themes on which the committee plans to take early action; it is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all the points that were raised, nor is it intended to be a definitive list of everything that the committee intends to do. The committee will continue to provide updates on its work going forward.

## Ongoing work

In parallel with its call for views exercise, the committee has already commenced and supported work in several areas that fit with its strategic aims.

## Outside interests and employment

The Modernisation Committee held early meetings on the issue of MPs' outside interests and employment, hearing from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. With the support of the Modernisation Committee, the Committee on Standards launched an inquiry into MPs' outside interests and employment on 31 January 2025.

This ongoing work ties in with the call for views, where outside interests and employment for MPs was one of the themes that emerged. Some responses argued for a complete ban on the grounds that outside interests represented a conflict of interest or attention, and others commented that outside interests could be useful in ensuring a diverse range of people are represented in the House, and that MPs could then bring their external expertise to their roles as parliamentarians.

### ICGS and Kernaghan recommendation 3

The Modernisation Committee is also involved in discussions aimed at taking forward recommendation 3 from Paul Kernaghan's review of Parliament's Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS), which set out that "an individual who seeks to make a complaint to a political party and whose allegations fall within the scope of the ICGS should be directed to the ICGS." Some responses to the call for views were positive about the ICGS, including noting how quickly it had become embedded and accepted. Others suggested there was still room for improvement.

### Proxy voting, electronic voting, call lists, written questions

At the request of the Leader of the House, the Procedure Committee is already undertaking an inquiry on proxy voting, including on whether proxy voting arrangements for serious long-term illness and injury should be made permanent. In addition, the Procedure Committee has announced inquiries into call lists and electronic voting, both of which were frequently raised topics in the call for views. The Modernisation Committee will be writing to the Procedure Committee to set out the variety of views it heard on these topics, and looks forward to seeing the results of the inquiries.

### Future work

Following the call for views, the committee intends to pursue three broad packages of work, which are set out below, as well as considering other issues on which there is a good chance of achieving consensus. As the committee takes further decisions about its future programme, and the three packages of work listed below, it will continue to work closely with other committees, the House of Commons Commission, the Speaker and Deputy Speakers, and to consult widely.

Pursuing this work will ensure that the House of Commons continues to be at the heart of important national debates, and that the chamber is a crucible for those debates and a place where MPs can use their time well and effectively, and have a positive impact on the lives of their constituents.

#### 1. Improving accessibility for MPs, staff and the public

This package of work will look at the accessibility of the physical parliamentary estate, and of House of Commons procedure and practices, and, more broadly, the accessibility of parliamentary language and information. It will consider the work that is already under way, as well as what more can be done.

Multiple responses to the call for views discussed the accessibility of the House of Commons to MPs, staff and visitors with disabilities, with this emerging as a particularly strong theme. Among internal parliamentary stakeholders, there was a view that the process for requesting reasonable adjustments could be improved. Responses that mentioned improving accessibility emphasised that this was a crucial part of ensuring that the House of Commons was inclusive and representative.

Some argued that parliamentary language and information about how the House of Commons works could be made more accessible, particularly in relation to the legislative process. To narrow the gap between the House of Commons and the public, it is important that the way the House works is

easier to understand. It is also crucial that the tone of debates, and behaviour in debates, reflects what the public expects of its elected MPs.

## 2. Effective use of the Commons

This package of work will consider how to make better use of the time available within existing sitting hours to facilitate effective scrutiny of legislation, and to give backbenchers and smaller parties a fair opportunity to raise issues and causes.

A number of topics came up in the call views relating to this theme, including the structure of the parliamentary week, the timing and allocation of Opposition days, Backbench Business days and Private Members' Bills, and whether current arrangements strike the right balance between backbenchers, the Government, the Opposition and smaller parties.

A deeper dive into effective legislative scrutiny should be a future workstream.

## 3. Creating more certainty about the timing and nature of parliamentary business

This package of work will explore practical ways to provide MPs, staff and the public with more certainty about the nature and timing of parliamentary business, with a view to making the House of Commons as effective and inclusive as possible for everyone.

In the call for views, among MPs, their staff and parliamentary staff, there was a desire for greater certainty about the nature and timing of parliamentary business, although there was also an acknowledgement of the fact that the work of Parliament will often be subject to change. Among MP responses, in particular, there was a sense that the lack of certainty made it hard for them to use their time as effectively as they might otherwise be able to do. The nature of being an MP has changed. Demands on their time are arguably greater and more varied than they have ever been, with MPs balancing their roles as legislators with increased casework and constituency commitments. This makes providing certainty where possible more crucial than ever.

Multiple responses called for more to be done to encourage a family friendly culture in the House of Commons. This was cited as an important part of encouraging a wide variety of people to become MPs. Uncertainty about parliamentary business was regarded as particularly difficult for those with caring responsibilities and smaller parties who are outside the formal communication channels.