

A guide to attending meetings of the House of Lords Committee on the Autism Act 2009

Introduction

1. Members of the public are welcome to attend public meetings of the House of Lords Committee on the Autism Act 2009. This is a guide about how to do so. You can also watch public meetings, either live or after they take place, online at www.parliamentlive.tv.
2. We have written this guide because we want to make the work of the Committee as accessible as possible. We welcome ideas on how this guide can be improved. Please tell us if anything is unclear or unhelpful, or if any information should be added. Please send any comments by email to HLAutismAct2009@parliament.uk.
3. You can watch previous examples of Committee evidence sessions here:
 - 10 March 2025: [Parliamentlive.tv - Autism Act 2009 Committee](#)
 - 17 March 2025: [Parliamentlive.tv - Autism Act 2009 Committee](#)
 - 24 March 2025: [Parliamentlive.tv - Autism Act 2009 Committee](#)
 - 31 March 2025: [Parliamentlive.tv - Autism Act 2009 Committee](#)

Introduction to the House of Lords Committee on the Autism Act 2009

4. Committees in the House of Lords hold inquiries about parts of Government policy. This is when they investigate what the Government is doing, ask how well it is working, and consider what the Government should do differently in the future. They set out their views in a published written report.
5. The Autism Act 2009 Committee in the House of Lords is looking into how well the Autism Act 2009 and the Government's autism strategy are working. The Committee on the Autism Act was appointed on 30 January 2025, and must publish a final report by the end of November 2025. Its work will finish at that point.
6. Committees ask people with knowledge and experience of the issue they are investigating to speak to them and answer questions. This is called oral evidence, and the people who speak to the Committee are described as witnesses.

7. These meetings are ‘on the record’, and are referred to as ‘public meetings’. This means that they are open to the public to attend, are broadcast on www.parliamentlive.tv and a written note (a transcript) of the discussion is published on the Parliament website. The things people say at these meetings may be included in the Committee’s published report.
8. Committees also invite submissions of written evidence via a published ‘call for evidence’. This is open to anyone to respond to within a response period of around eight weeks. Separate guidance is available about this, including on submitting evidence in other formats.
9. The Committee’s job is to scrutinise Government policy. It is not able to take on casework, such as considering or seeking to resolve individual cases, personal complaints or requests for redress. Nor is the Committee able to examine failings in specific institutions in a way that a public inquiry would. If you would like political support or advice, you may wish to [contact your local Member of Parliament](#). If you have an urgent problem, you can find sources of help here: <https://www.autism.org.uk/contact-us/urgent-help>.

Committee members

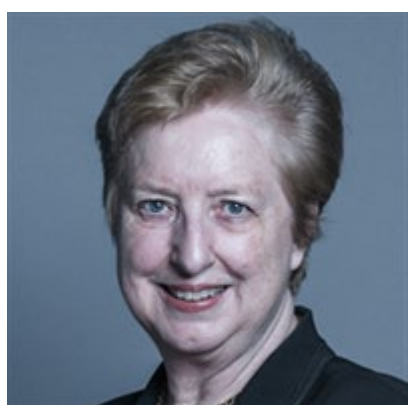
10. The Committee has 12 members, representing the three largest political parties in the House of Lords (the Conservative Party, Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats) and the group of independent peers (known as ‘Crossbenchers’). Pictures of the Committee members are below.



Baroness Rock
Chair



Lord Addington



Baroness Browning



Lord Crisp



Baroness Goudie



Baroness Hodgson of
Abinger



Lord Elliott of Mickle Fell



Lord Hope of Craighead



Lord Scriven



Baroness Pitkeathley



Baroness Ritchie of
Downpatrick



Lord Wigley

11. The Chair of the Committee is Baroness Rock. Her photograph is above. The Chair has an important role in ensuring that Committee meetings run properly.

Committee staff

12. The Committee has a small staff team, who also attend meetings. Other members of staff in attendance at Committee meetings include officials looking after the live audio/visual broadcast of the meeting, parliamentary reporters making a written note of what is said at the meeting, and doorkeepers with responsibility for safety and security.

Members of the public attending Committee meetings

13. Members of the public are able to attend public meetings of the Committee, but you are not allowed to speak. You can use physical aids or move around if you need to. Sensory toys and a small supply of ear defenders are also available for use during the meeting.

14. Committees also meet in private from time to time to discuss their programme of work, to consider the evidence they have received, and to consider and agree their final report. Although Committees prefer to take evidence in public so that it can be included in their reports, they can also meet individuals in private where this is more appropriate. The Committee also meets in private briefly before and after each public evidence session. Members of the public are not allowed to attend private meetings of the Committee.

What to expect on the day

Arriving at the building and security arrangements

15. Visitors to the Houses of Parliament enter through the Cromwell Green entrance. It is opposite the back of Westminster Abbey. It is marked 8 on [this map of Parliament and the surrounding area](#). There is a glass hut with some Visitor Assistants and Police Officers outside it, and a walkway leading down to the security area. A picture of the entrance is below.



16. Parliament is open to the public but, because of the crucial work that goes on here, your security and safety are very important. Just like all visitors, you must go through security checks when entering the building. These checks are similar to the ones that are done at airports. A list of items that you are not allowed to bring into Parliament is [online](#).
17. Security Officers will be there to explain what is happening in more detail if you are concerned about the process. Armed police officers are a visible presence both inside and outside Parliament. This is for the safety of those using the building.
18. You should leave plenty of time to pass through security. You should expect this to take at least 30 minutes. At busy times the delay could be longer.
19. You will be met at the entrance by a member of staff. They will ask you what type of visit you are making. You should explain that you are coming to watch a House of Lords Committee.
20. Assistance dogs (including registered, licenced and trained therapy dogs) are welcome to attend UK Parliament. Dogs must be kept on a lead at all times.
21. Once you have passed through search and screening, you will be given a visitor pass lanyard to wear. This must be worn visibly at all times throughout your visit to Parliament and allows you to move freely in public areas. You should expect to be challenged by security staff or other passholders if they cannot see your pass or who is escorting you.
22. For further information see:
 - This 10-minute video 'Accessibility at UK Parliament', which includes subtitles and British Sign Language: [Watch the video 'Accessibility at UK Parliament'](#)
 - [Accessibility - UK Parliament](#)
 - [Access to debates and committees - UK Parliament](#)
 - [Access and assistance devices - UK Parliament](#)
 - Virtual tour of Parliament:
<https://www.parliament.uk/visiting/virtualtour/>

Waiting for the meeting to start

23. After passing through security, you should then make your way to the Committee Corridor. Visitor Assistants will be able to give directions. Please let them know if you need to use an accessible route.

24. The Committee webpage will say where the Committee meeting will take place. The Committee on the Autism Act 2009 will usually meet in Committee Room 2A (see photograph below). A room next door (Committee Room 3A) will be available as a quiet room, if you need it. Please let Committee staff know if you wish to use the quiet room.
25. You should wait either in the quiet room or in the corridor outside the Committee room, where there are seats available. A member of staff will come out of the meeting room to invite members of the public to enter the Committee room when the Committee is ready to begin.
26. There are accessible toilets and a water fountain nearby, and Committee staff or Visitor Assistants will be able to direct you. No food or drinks other than water are allowed in the Committee room. Smoking or vaping is not permitted anywhere within the building.

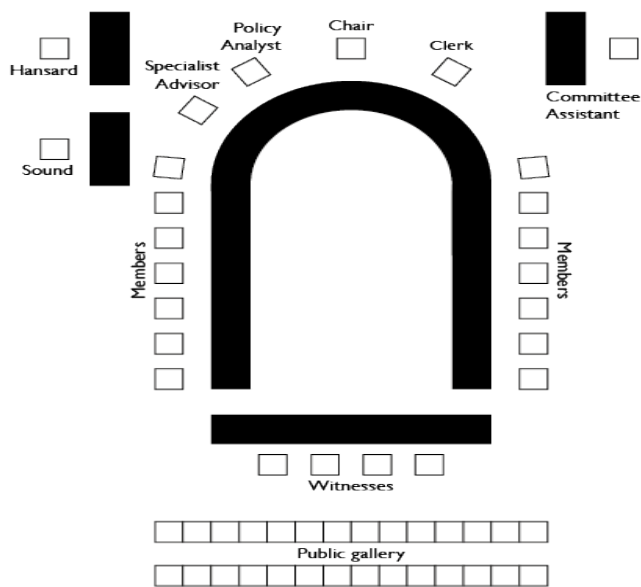
The Committee room

27. The Committee usually meets in Committee Room 2A. A picture of the room is below.



Committee Room 2A

28. Below is a diagram of the usual layout of the Committee rooms. The layout may sometimes change.



29. For public meetings, the Chair sits at the centre of the horseshoe-shaped table, with officials on either side of her. Other members of the Committee sit at the horseshoe-shaped table. They do not sit in any set positions. Everyone sat at the horseshoe-shaped table will have nameplates in front of them. Other officials sit at tables to the side.
30. Members of the public sit in the rows of seats at the back of the room (known as the 'public gallery'). A doorkeeper may also sit at the back of the room.
31. Public Committee meetings normally last for between one and two hours. You can enter or leave the room at any point during the public meeting. The Committee normally meets in private for a short time before and after the public evidence session. You will not be allowed in the room when the Committee is meeting in private.

The division bell

32. The evidence session may be paused for approximately ten minutes for votes in the House of Lords (known as divisions). The timing of votes cannot be predicted in advance. A vote is indicated by the ringing of the division bell. The bell is loud and will ring suddenly and for a continuous period two or three times. It will ring in the event of votes in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords, although a meeting only needs to be paused for votes in the House of Lords. You can hear what the division bell sounds like here: [Division bell \(MP3 159 KB\)](#)

Fire alarm and other emergencies

33. Although it sounds similar, the division bell is not a fire alarm. In the event of a fire or other emergency, a loud tannoy announcement will say: “A fire has been reported in your building.” In the event of an emergency, please follow the instructions of staff, who will direct you to the nearest exit.

Other sensory information

34. In the Committee room and elsewhere in the building you may also encounter:

- Television screens showing business in the House of Commons and House of Lords (known as annunciators: see image below) and large monitors in the Committee room.
- Other noises from the annunciators to indicate what is happening in the House of Commons or House of Lords (such as a repeated guitar chord or single bell)
- Officials whispering or speaking loudly
- Noise from heating vents and fans
- Static noise from microphones
- Noise from officials typing on keyboards
- Noise from people in the corridor outside the meeting room
- Food odours from kitchens and dining rooms
- Doors opening and closing as people enter or leave the meeting room
- Noises and notifications on electronic devices, which members may use in a meeting.
- Patterned wallpaper and carpets (see images below. However, please note that the Committee will meet in rooms with less prominent wallpaper and carpets)
- Bright lighting (including some fluorescent lighting)



The end of the evidence session

35. At the end of the evidence session, the Committee Chair will thank the witnesses for your evidence. She will then say, “My Lords, that concludes this evidence session.” The evidence session will finish at that point, and the broadcasting of the meeting will stop. After this, Committee staff will invite members of the public to leave the meeting.