

**Written Evidence for inquiry into Commons scrutiny of Secretaries of State in
the House of Lords**

CSL 04: Organise



Response to the Procedure Committee's inquiry into the scrutiny of Secretaries of State in the House of Lords

December 2023

To the Procedure Committee,

Organise is a worker-led platform with over one million members, where people from all sectors, professions and work situations come together to change the working lives of millions of people for the better.

Over 13,000 people responded to the Committee's call for evidence on the ways MPs might effectively scrutinise Secretaries of State in the House of Lords. Their voices and views make up this report.

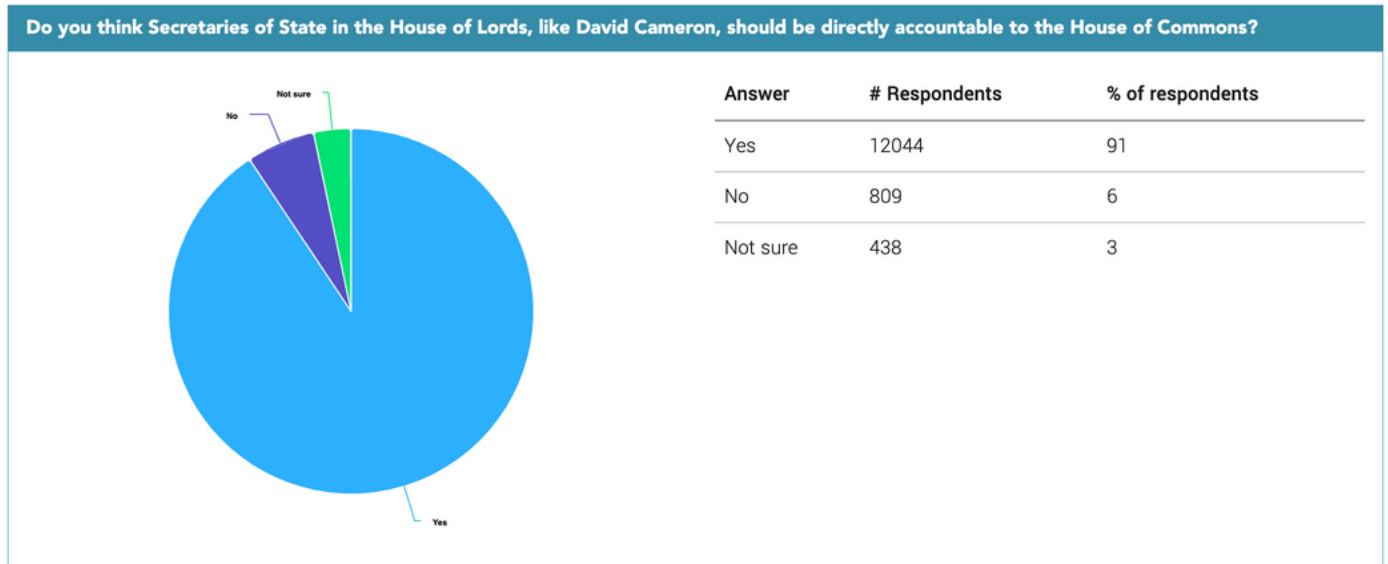
91% of people think that Secretaries of State in the House of Lords should be directly accountable to MPs.

These personal testimonies come from members of the public in support of Secretaries of State in the House of Lords being held accountable by the House of Commons.

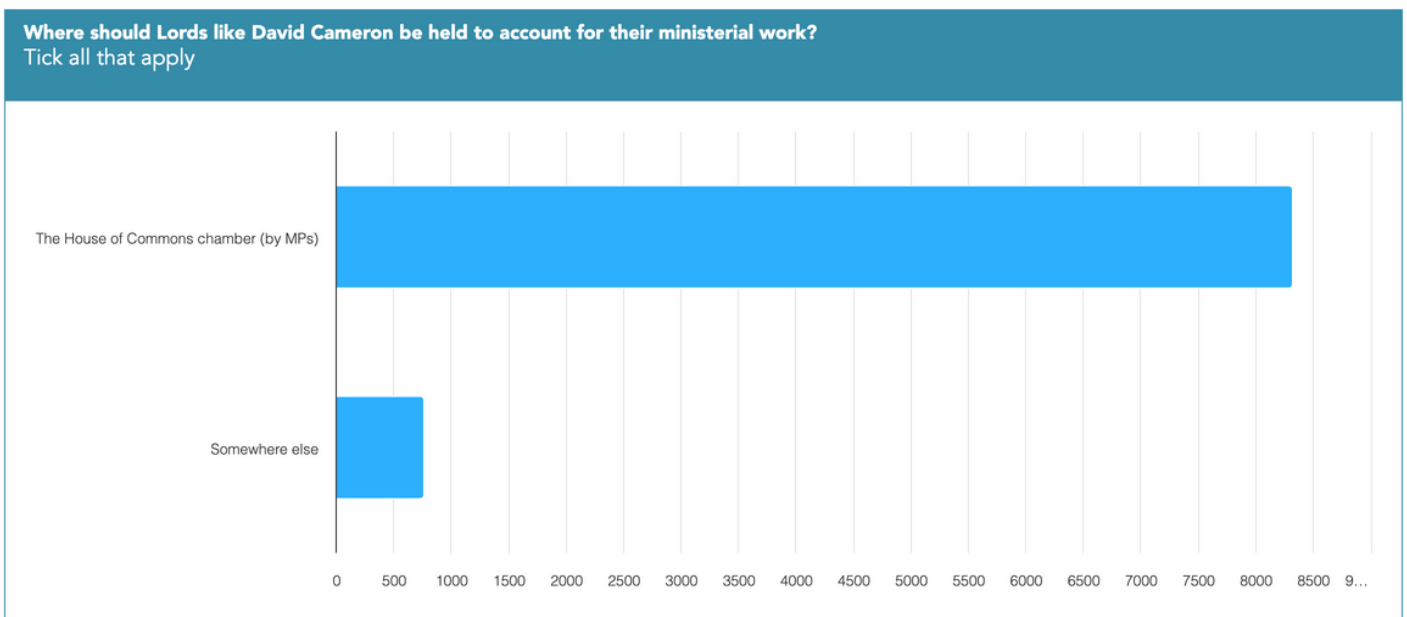
Top finding from the survey:

12,044 people believe that Secretaries of State in the House of Lords should be held to account for their ministerial work by MPs

Should Secretaries of State in the House of Lords be directly accountable to the House of Commons?



Where should Lords be held to account for their ministerial work?



8,472 people believe Secretaries of State in the House of Lords should be held accountable by MPs while 783 think they should be held accountable somewhere else.

"By an independent committee who are 100% impartial."

"Lords should be held to account by the voting public"

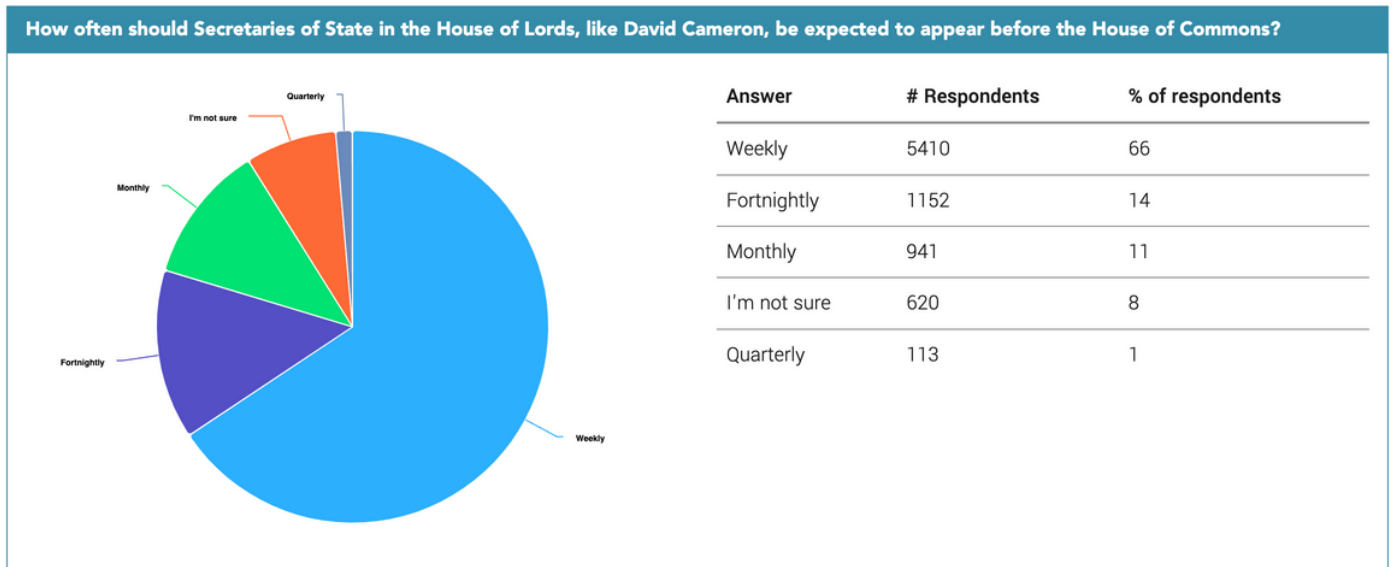
"There should be a public committee who holds them accountable"

"Independent board with authority to penalize and suspend"

"I believe there needs to be an independent public body to do this, with no permanent members, and reflecting ALL tiers of society. The House of Lords is as corrupt as the Tories who are filling it with their friends and family."

"We need an elected chamber of candidates from ordinary walks of life, no candidates pushed into the committee by MPs. In fact, MPs, lobbyists, Lords, and Ministers should be barred from selection - in addition to media types, news editors, owners of media, their proxies, landed gentry, people with titles, people who are Knights or carry medals, and most of all no royals. Members of this independent chamber must have a term limit of one year, one term served maximum. They should be paid a standard wage. And this chamber should have teeth. If they say someone needs to be held accountable and barred from power, that should stick. Even if it's the PM."

How often should Secretaries of State in the House of Lords be expected to appear before the House of Commons?



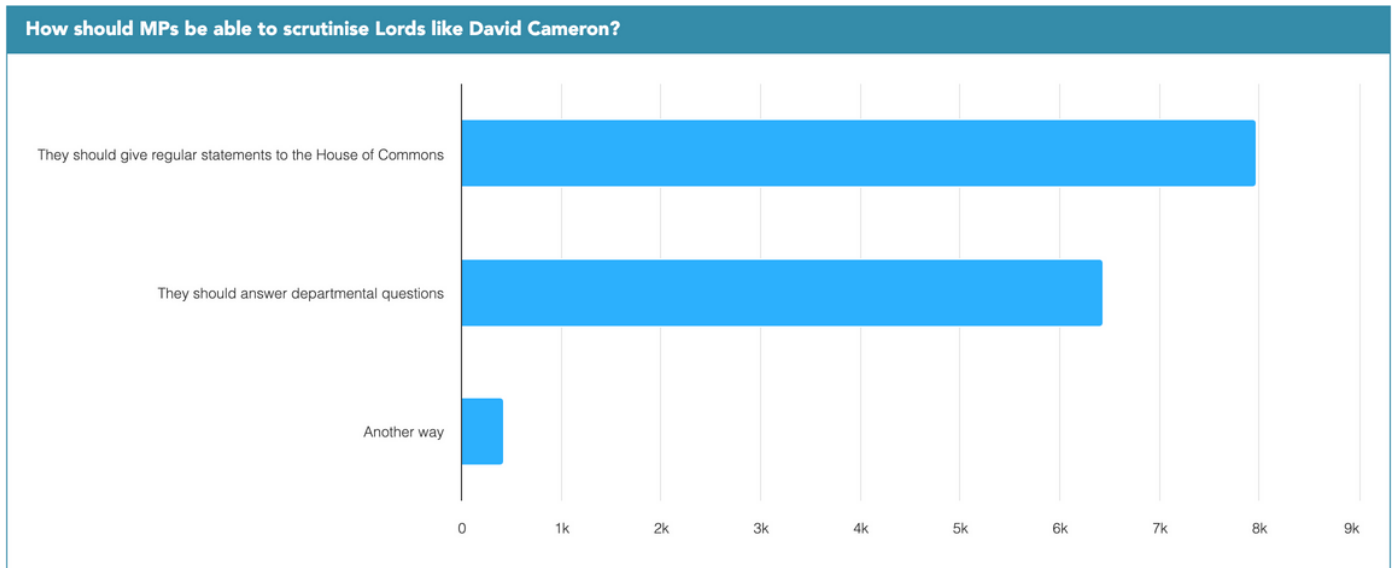
66% want Secretaries of State in the House of Lords to appear before the House of Commons on a weekly basis. Here's what some respondents said:

"They should have to report to and explain their decisions to MPs in the democratically elected House of Commons."

"All Government Ministers and Secretaries of State should be sitting MPs"

"Ministers should be selected from MPs rather than House of Lords in the first place. Additionally to select someone for House of Lords and then to a ministerial position is even more concerning and away from a democratic pathway"

How should MPs be able to scrutinise Secretaries of State in the House of Lords?



7,977 people want Lords to provide regular statements to MPs while **6,439** want them to answer departmental questions. Here's what some respondents said:

"When suspect information arises an inquiry should be held."

"All bank details should be transparent. If they are on the payroll of big firms, we deserve to know."

"They should also be asked to answer questions on their comments by an independent committee."

"They should be jointly and severely liable for life for any misconduct personally with the minister who appointed them... and maybe the Prime Minister of the day, if a different person."

"If they are a government minister they must personally be present in the House of Commons whenever there is any debate concerning the department they are Minister or Secretary of State for."

"They need to be open to some sort of recall by the electorate."

"David Cameron has in effect been seconded to the House of Commons and is therefore an employee of that House and answerable to all its codes of practice as any person would be when seconded to another position."

"They should be subject to scrutiny in a Commons subcommittee with the same powers as the Chamber of the Commons."

"They should be answerable to the elected MPs of all sides not just the Prime Minister that appointed them"

"They must be accountable to the electorate that is supposed to be being represented."

"Their activities should be monitored - ideally perhaps by civil service staff as we'd expect all MPs to be."

How can MPs effectively scrutinise Secretaries of State in the House of Lords?

Organise members suggest that Lords should report to MPs regularly.

"Once a month would be minimum but if there was a crisis (like the Israel-Palestine situation) they could be called to answer questions."

"Secs of State from the Lords should be expected to appear before the Commons as and when required - depending on what is going on in the world."

"Although unelected, Lords hold a position of responsibility that may affect many lives, so must face regular scrutiny."

"Mandatory scheduled appearances for questioning by the relevant Select Committee. Basically, as Ministers, they should be subject to the exact and full range of scrutiny as elected MPs who are Ministers"

"If they do not appear very often - it means that they are either hiding things or too lazy to attend. It also undermines democracy and does not give members of the House of Commons the chance to query or ask questions about issues that could impact negatively on the general public and MPs"

Organise members think it's vital that Secretaries of State in the House of Lords are transparent and face proper scrutiny.

"They should provide complete transparency which the general public can scrutinise"

"The voting record needs to be monitored to check for undue bias or influence from outside lobbyists, agencies or organisations"

"A separate 'Scrutiny Committee' of MPs should be formed to interrogate the likes of David Cameron at a monthly Q&A that also has the power to censure or dismiss them for impropriety or unlawful action."

"They should not profit from their position at any time."

"They should be accountable to the electorate - somehow. Politicians should have measurable performance targets, and get penalised when they fail to deliver."

"Every investment, business link and source of all income should be openly and honestly divulged to an independent parliamentary ombudsman-body; this should also apply to MPs as well as peers."

Organise members feel strongly about the importance of Lords more accurately representing the UK's diverse population.

"Right now, many MPs and Lords don't represent the poor or hard-working nor understand their plight such as homelessness, long NHS waiting times, the cost of living, and ordinary people stealing because they can't afford basic amenities."

"People like David Cameron should not be able to slip into the House of Lords under the radar. The people who pay his wages are the public, not his friends. Out with the archaic rules and in with the right way to do things now - total transparency."

"Frankly, I still do not understand how anyone can hold a ministerial position in the House of Commons when they have not been elected as an MP - it would appear, from David Cameron's appointment, that ANYONE could be appointed to government simply by being made a peer by whoever happens to be PM! I thought the UK was supposed to be a democracy?"

"Unelected politicians should actually not be allowed to take up important roles in gov"

"Lords should be held to account by people chosen from outside the Commons/Lords, like judges, doctors, teachers, etc."

“There should be an independent body that oversees Lords like David Cameron. Made up of civil servants NOT MPs. They need to be impartial and professionally trained to understand the workings of government.”

“There should be a clear stated set of standards for those seeking public office which they agree by law to conform to in carrying out their role.”

“Lords should be held to account by an independent tribunal composed of judges, citizens and legal experts. They should have to declare any earnings outside Parliament and submit their tax returns to the Treasury for scrutiny.”

“It seems very wrong that a peer - without representation status to the people - is made a major figure in the government.”

“All publicly funded personnel in government should publish their income that is received above and beyond the MP salary including the additional committees attended and outsourced work.”

“I think it is scandalous that someone with Cameron’s dubious record, who has not been elected, is put into such a powerful position.”

Based on the evidence provided by over 13,000 Organise members, we recommend the following options to scrutinise Lords who serve as Secretaries of State:

- 1) Lords must regularly report to the House of Commons on their work and the work of their departments**
- 2) Mechanisms must be implemented to ensure the transparency of Lords' business transactions and any financial gain made beyond their salary**
- 3) Members of the public should be better able to scrutinise the work of Lords serving as Secretaries of State, and the work of their departments, such as by submitting questions to the Commons**

Thank you for reading this response to the call for evidence into ways that MPs can effectively scrutinise Secretaries of State in the House of Lords.

Organise members are calling on you to respond to this report and take action.

We look forward to hearing your reply which we will share with Organise members.

To respond to this report, please email Roxana Khan-Williams from the Organise staff team, on action@organise.network

Sources:

Organise survey 1: <https://the.organise.network/surveys/1689/results/public>

Organise survey 2: <https://the.organise.network/surveys/1688/results/public>

Further survey results about whether Lords should be able to hold ministerial positions:

<https://the.organise.network/surveys/1682/results/public>