

SPEAKER'S CONFERENCE MOTION: FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES

Memorandum by the Accounting Officer

1. A motion has been tabled by the Leader of the House to establish a Speaker's Conference to consider the factors influencing the threat levels against candidates and MPs and the effectiveness of the response to such threats, and make recommendations about the arrangements necessary to secure free and fair elections and the appropriate protection of candidates at future UK-wide parliamentary elections and of elected representatives thereafter.

2. The motion reads as follows:

That -

This House considers that it is essential that elections to the United Kingdom Parliament are conducted freely and fairly, without threats or violence; that candidates are able to campaign in safety, with appropriate protection and support; and that elected representatives can do their job securely, and accordingly agrees that the following Order be made:

(1) There shall be a committee to be known as the Speaker's Conference which shall consist of the Speaker, who shall be Chair, and up to 14 other Members appointed by the Speaker.

(2) The Conference shall consider the factors influencing the threat levels against candidates and MPs and the effectiveness of the response to such threats, and make recommendations about the arrangements necessary to secure free and fair elections and the appropriate protection of candidates at future UK-wide parliamentary elections and of elected representatives thereafter.

(3) The Speaker shall appoint one or more of the members of the Conference to act as vice-Chair in his absence.

(4) Except as provided in this Order, the Conference and any sub-committee thereof that the Speaker shall appoint shall conduct its proceedings in such manner as the Speaker shall determine, notwithstanding any Standing Order or practice of this House.

(5) The Conference shall have power—

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House and to adjourn from place to place;

(b) to report from time to time;

(c) to appoint legal advisers, and to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference.

(6) The Speaker shall have power to appoint sub-committees of the Speaker's Conference and sub-committees appointed under this order shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from

place to place, to report from time to time their formal minutes, and shall have a quorum of three.

(7) The quorum of the Conference shall be five.

(8) This Order shall have effect until the end of the current Parliament.

3. Under Standing Order No 22C, a motion which if agreed would have a direct consequence of additional expenditure under the House of Commons: Administration Estimate, estimated to be £50,000 or more shall not be considered by the House unless a memorandum setting out its expected financial consequences has been made available to the House by the Accounting Officer. This memorandum therefore seeks to set out the expected financial consequences were the House to agree this motion.
4. It has been assumed that the Speaker's Conference would require a staff of four, costing an estimated £289,000 a year. Initially it is envisaged that staff would be provided by transferring staff from the Select Committee Team and other offices in the House with the aim of replacing them by concurrent recruitment if possible. I have not included the costs of media support, on the assumption that these costs will be met from existing media teams within either House.
5. It is assumed that the non-pay expenditure incurred by the Speaker's Conference would be comparable to departmental select committee. On average select committees spend approximately £46,000 a year on non-staff costs including travel and subsistence. In addition, an initial budget of £50,000 is required to provide access to legal advisers.
6. The total anticipated cost of establishing the Speaker's Conference would therefore be of the order of £385,000 a year for the duration of the current Parliament. Any net additional costs in 2024-25 will be met from the House of Commons central contingency. Funding for on-going costs thereafter will be obtained through the House of Commons financial planning process and added into baseline budgets from 2025-2026 onwards.