

SPEAKER'S CONFERENCE MOTION

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

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 and make recommendations on the employment conditions of Members' staff in order to ensure a more inclusive and respectful working environment. Currently, individual MPs are each responsible for the employment of their own staff. The Conference will be able to consider whether this remains appropriate. It will approach its task without preconceptions.
2. Speaker's Conferences were originally mechanisms for looking at electoral law. They provide a mechanism for cross party examination of important matters about the working of the institutions of our democracy. The most recent conference was established in 2008 to "consider and make recommendations for rectifying the disparity between the representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in the House of Commons and their representation in the UK population at large". It had power to agree to consider other associated matters.¹
3. Like the 2008 Conference, the current Speaker's Conference would be established as a Committee of the House of Commons, with the powers and legal protections that that entails. This will ensure that it can secure any evidence it needs, and that evidence can be given to it freely.
4. Paragraph (1) establishes the Speaker's Conference and provides it shall include the Speaker and up to 14 other members. The Speaker will appoint the members of the Speaker's Conference, and it is expected he will, as usual, have regard to party representation in the House, and do so after discussions with the parties. It is customary for the Speaker to appoint one or more members to act as vice-Chair in his absence, and paragraph (2) allows this.
5. The Speaker's Conference will conduct its business in a way determined by the Speaker, and so may, if it is considered useful, depart from the normal rules by which the House and its Committees conduct their business (paragraph (5)). There is power for the Speaker to appoint sub-committees, but no requirement to do so (paragraph (6)). The quorum of the Conference will be 5 (see paragraph (7)).
6. Paragraph (6) gives the Speaker's Conference the powers enjoyed by most select committees, namely,
 - to require evidence to be given to it;
 - to sit at times the House is adjourned;
 - to travel (to adjourn from place to place);
 - to make one or more reports;
 - to appoint specialist advisers.

¹ 12 November 2008, Session 2008-09.

The Committee is also given power to appoint legal advisers, since it may wish to consider employment law and other legal matters.

7. The Order establishing the Speaker's Conference has effect until the end of the current Parliament (paragraph (8)), but to ensure that progress is made, the Committee is required to produce its first Report to the House, including the principles underpinning its work, by October 2022 (paragraph (6)).