

House of Commons
Procedure Committee

**GOVERNMENT
RESPONSE TO THE
COMMITTEE'S SECOND
REPORT OF SESSION
2001–02: APPOINTMENT
OF DEPUTY SPEAKERS**

Second Special Report of
Session 2001–02

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The Procedure Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider the practice and procedure of the House of Commons in the conduct of public business and to make recommendations.

Current Membership

Sir Nicholas Winterton (*Conservative, Macclesfield*) (Chairman)
 Mr John Burnett (*Liberal Democrat, Torridge & West Devon*)
 David Hamilton (*Labour, Midlothian*)
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 Sir Robert Smith (*Liberal Democrat, West Aberdeenshire & Kincardine*)
 Mr Desmond Swayne (*Conservative, New Forest West*)
 David Wright (*Labour, Telford*)

The following were also members of the Committee during this Parliament:

Alistair Burt (*Conservative, North East Bedfordshire*)
 Mr David Drew (*Labour, Stroud*)
 Ian Lucas (*Labour, Wrexham*)
 Mr John Lyons (*Labour, Strathkelvin & Bearsden*)
 Mr David Rendel (*Liberal Democrat, Newbury*)

Powers

The powers of the Committee are set out in Standing Order No 147 made on 16 July 2001. This is available on the Internet at www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/commons/selcom/prochome.htm.

Contacts

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SECOND SPECIAL REPORT

The Procedure Committee has agreed to the following Special Report:

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S SECOND REPORT OF SESSION 2001-02: APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY SPEAKERS

In April 2002 we published our second Report of the present Session, on *Appointment of Deputy Speakers* (HC 770). We have now received a response from the Government, in the form of a letter to the Chairman from the Rt Hon Robin Cook MP, Leader of the House. This is as follows:

Government Response

I am writing in response to the Procedure Committee's Second Report of this Session, on the Appointment of Deputy Speakers, i.e. the Chairman of Ways and Means, and First and Second Deputy Chairmen of Ways and Means. I am very grateful to the Committee for its thorough examination not just of the appointment but of the role of Deputy Speakers. It was obviously appropriate to do this in the light of the House's agreement to the Committee's proposals for the election of a Speaker. It is very helpful to the House to have two such considered reports which together deal with the role of all the occupants of the Chair.

I wholeheartedly agree with the Committee's conclusions about the valuable role the Deputy Speakers play in Parliamentary life. I also agree that the Members of the Chairman's Panel not only perform a real service to the House, but, in doing so, inevitably qualify themselves for serious consideration when vacancies arise for Deputy Speaker. It would be perverse to ignore their claims. However, as the Committee acknowledges, there may still be occasions when someone not on the Panel may be nominated; the reasons why a particular name is put forward will vary in each case but such nominations should not be seen as a reflection on Panel members.

I entirely agree that it is important for the Speaker and his deputies to work as a team broadly balanced by party and, as far as possible, gender. Consultation with the Speaker is clearly important in this, and I welcome the Committee's conclusion that the calibre of the Deputies, individually and as a team, demonstrates that the current system is broadly effective. The Committee suggests some improvements. The Government will, as far as practicable, attempt to give the House notice of those to be proposed as Deputy Speakers in the course of a Parliament, and would be content for the Speaker to give informal notification to the House at the start of a Parliament, if he was willing to do so.

There remains one point where I have reservations. I do not think it appropriate to prescribe in advance how a particular motion should be moved, or what the mover should say. Unlike the appointment of the Speaker, the motion to appoint his deputies is normally moved formally and I would not wish to encourage a presumption that there should always be a speech. Although I am sure that anyone moving a motion to nominate a Deputy Speaker will bear the Committee's recommendation in mind, they will also have to consider the need to avoid the risk of undermining the authority of any nominee for a Deputy Speakership by laying bare all that was said in consultation.

Once again, I am extremely grateful to the Committee for its work.

Rt Hon Robin Cook MP
Leader of the House of Commons and President of the Council

8 July 2002