



House of Commons

Select Committee on
Modernisation of the House of
Commons

Debating departmental objectives and annual reports

Second Report of Session 2007–08



House of Commons
Select Committee on
Modernisation of the House of
Commons

**Debating departmental
objectives and annual
reports**

Second Report of Session 2007–08

*Report, together with formal minutes and
written evidence*

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 30 April 2008*

The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons

The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons is appointed by the House of Commons to consider how the House operates and to make recommendations for modernisation.

Current membership

Ms Harriet Harman (*Labour, Camberwell & Peckham*) (Chairman)
Chris Bryant (*Labour, Rhondda*)
Ms Dawn Butler (*Labour, Brent South*)
Ann Coffey (*Labour, Stockport*)
Philip Davies (*Conservative, Shipley*)
John Hemming (*Birmingham Yardley*)
Mr George Howarth (*Labour, Knowsley North & Sefton East*)
Mr Simon Hughes (*Liberal Democrat, North Southwark & Bermondsey*)
Mr Greg Knight (*Conservative, Yorkshire East*)
Mark Lazarowicz (*Labour/Co-operative, Edinburgh North and Leith*)
Mrs Theresa May (*Conservative, Maidenhead*)
Mr Richard Shepherd (*Conservative, Aldridge-Brownhills*)
Sir Peter Soulsby (*Lab, Leicester South*)
Sir Nicholas Winterton (*Conservative, Macclesfield*)
Mr Iain Wright (*Labour, Hartlepool*)

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

Liz Blackman (*Labour, Erewash*)
Mr Paul Burstow (*Liberal Democrat, Sutton & Cheam*)
Chris Grayling (*Conservative, Epsom and Ewell*)
Mr David Heath (*Liberal Democrat, Somerton and Frome*)
Mr Geoffrey Hoon (*Labour, Ashfield*) (Chairman)
Jessica Morden (*Labour, Newport East*)
Mr Adrian Sanders (*Liberal Democrat, Torbay*)
Mr Jack Straw (*Labour, Blackburn*) (Chairman)
Graham Stringer (*Labour, Manchester Blackley*)
Andrew Stunell (*Liberal Democrat, Hazel Grove*)
Paddy Tipping (*Labour, Sherwood*)
Mr Edward Vaizey (*Conservative, Wantage*)
Lynda Waltho (*Labour, Stourbridge*)

Powers

The powers of the Committee are set out in an Appendix to the House of Commons Standing Orders. These are available on the Internet via 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 <http://www.parliament.uk/modcom>. A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this Report.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Helen Irwin and Dr Susan Griffiths (Clerks), Susan Morrison (Committee Assistant) and Jane Cooper (Secretary).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk, Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, Journal Office, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 3318; the Committee's email address is modcom@parliament.uk

Contents

Report	Page
Summary	3
1 Introduction	5
2 History	5
Select Committees	5
Scrutiny in the Chamber	6
<i>The Governance of Britain</i>	6
3 Effective scrutiny	8
Timing	8
Select Committees and the Chamber	9
PSAs	10
Departmental Annual Reports and other documents	11
4 Departmental debates	12
“Tagging”	12
Debates in government time	13
Using existing Select Committee time	14
5 Conclusion	15
List of recommendations	16
Formal Minutes	19
List of written evidence	20
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	21

Summary

In *The Governance of Britain* Green Paper, published in July 2007, the Government proposed that the annual objectives and plans of Government departments should regularly be debated in the House of Commons. It asked the Modernisation Committee to consider ways to provide for this.

We welcome the Government's desire to establish a more systematic and effective scrutiny of departmental performance, however, the time available for debates on the floor of the House is limited and already subject to many competing pressures. In this Report we consider practical measures through which scrutiny of departmental objectives could be made more effective within the limited time available.

We have concluded that a balance of different measures would be appropriate. More consistent tagging of Departmental Annual Reports and associated select committee publications would help to identifying existing opportunities for debate more clearly and would provide Members with the material needed for effective scrutiny. Although there is little scope for timetabling additional debates without displacing existing business that is of interest to Members, some time could be found in Westminster Hall. Finally, the Government should consider whether existing select committee time in the Chamber could be extended.

We do not consider it necessary to debate every government department each year. Instead, we strongly support Liaison Committee input into the choice of department for debate. The objective of any new arrangements for debating departmental objectives in the Chamber should be to enhance and build upon the existing and effective scrutiny carried out by select committees.

