



House of Commons
Liaison Committee

Rebuilding the House: Select Committee Issues

First Report of Session 2009–10

Report, together with formal minutes

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 14 January 2010*

HC 272

Published on 27 January 2010
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£0.00

The Liaison Committee

The Liaison Committee is appointed to consider general matters relating to the work of select committees; to advise the House of Commons Commission on select committees; to choose select committee reports for debate in the House and to hear evidence from the Prime Minister on matters of public policy.

Current membership

Mr Alan Williams MP (*Labour, Swansea West*) (Chairman)

The Chairmen for the time being of the Select Committees listed below:

Administration – Mr Frank Doran MP (*Labour, Aberdeen North*)
Business, Innovation and Skills – Peter Luff MP (*Conservative, Mid Worcestershire*)
Children, Schools and Families – Mr Barry Sheerman MP (*Labour/Co-op, Huddersfield*)
Communities and Local Government – Dr Phyllis Starkey MP (*Labour, Milton Keynes South West*)
Culture, Media and Sport – Mr John Whittingdale MP (*Conservative, Maldon and Chelmsford East*)
Defence – Mr James Arbuthnot MP (*Conservative, North East Hampshire*)
Energy and Climate Change – Mr Elliot Morley (*Labour, Scunthorpe*)
Environmental Audit – Mr Tim Yeo MP (*Conservative, South Suffolk*)
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – Mr Michael Jack MP (*Conservative, Fylde*)
European Scrutiny – Michael Connarty MP (*Labour, Linlithgow and East Falkirk*)
Finance and Services – Sir Stuart Bell MP (*Labour, Middlesbrough*)
Foreign Affairs – Mike Gapes MP (*Labour/Co-op, Ilford South*)
Health – Mr Kevin Barron MP (*Labour, Rother Valley*)
Home Affairs – Keith Vaz MP (*Labour, Leicester East*)
Human Rights (Joint Committee) – Mr Andrew Dismore MP (*Labour, Hendon*)
International Development – Malcolm Bruce MP (*Liberal Democrat, Gordon*)
Justice – Sir Alan Beith MP (*Liberal Democrat, Berwick-upon-Tweed*)
Members' Allowances – Mr Don Touhig (*Labour, Islwyn*)
Northern Ireland Affairs – Sir Patrick Cormack MP (*Conservative, South Staffordshire*)
Procedure – Mr Greg Knight MP (*Conservative, Yorkshire East*)
Public Accounts – Mr Edward Leigh MP (*Conservative, Gainsborough*)
Public Administration – Dr Tony Wright MP (*Labour, Cannock Chase*)
Regulatory Reform – Andrew Miller MP (*Labour, Ellesmere Port and Neston*)
Science and Technology – Mr Phil Willis MP (*Liberal Democrat, Harrogate and Knaresborough*)
Scottish Affairs – Mr Mohammad Sarwar MP (*Labour, Glasgow Central*)
Selection – Rosemary McKenna MP (*Labour Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East*)
Standards and Privileges – Sir Malcolm Rifkind MP (*Conservative,*)
Statutory Instruments – David Maclean MP (*Conservative, Penrith and The Border*)
Transport – Mrs Louise Ellman MP (*Labour/Co-op, Liverpool Riverside*)
Treasury – John McFall MP (*Labour/Co-op, West Dunbartonshire*)
Welsh Affairs – Dr Hywel Francis MP (*Labour, Aberavon*)
Work and Pensions – Mr Terry Rooney MP (*Labour, Bradford North*)

Powers

The powers of the Committee are set out in House of Commons SO No 145. 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 www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/liaison_committee.cfm.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Jacqy Sharpe (Clerk), Robert Wilson (Second Clerk), Kevin Candy (Senior Committee Assistant) and Lee Chiddicks (Committee Assistant). For this Report they were assisted by Paul Evans (Principal Clerk, Select Committees).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerks of the Liaison Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 72195675; the Committee's email address is liaisoncommittee@parliament.uk

Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
1 Introduction	3
2 Chairs and members	5
Election of Chairs	5
Appointment of members	6
Election of members	7
Disqualifications from membership	7
Dismissal from membership	8
3 Size, number and role of select committees	9
Size of committees	9
Number of committees	9
Role of committees	11
4 Setting the agenda	12
A new way of setting the agenda	12
Estimates days and scrutiny of expenditure	12
“Ten-minute rule” report presentations	13
5 Involving the public	14
Select committees and the public	14
Petitions	14
6 Conclusion	15
Conclusions and recommendations	16
Formal Minutes	19
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	21

1 Introduction

1. The Report from the House of Commons Reform Committee, *Rebuilding the House*,¹ notes:

The select committees are widely respected and seen as generally functioning well ... There is a strong desire to strengthen yet further these forums for cross-party work and government scrutiny and indeed extend the way they work to other parts of parliamentary life.²

One of the characteristics that is most valued in the select committees is the way in which Members work together constructively across party boundaries, with the emphasis being on the quality of policy decisions.³

We welcome this recognition of the work of select committees and share the Committee's analysis of its positive aspects. The select committees are a thriving and respected aspect of the House's work, and their particular strengths should provide firm foundations for rebuilding trust and engagement in the parliamentary process amongst those who elect us.

2. The Reform Committee was asked to look at only two specific areas of select committee procedure: the election of committee Chairs⁴ and the appointment of committee members. We consider its recommendations on these and related matters in the chapters which follow. But the Reform Committee also remarked:

The House devotes considerable resources to select committees and then largely neglects their output in drawing up the House agenda.⁵

We agree. Select committees need to have their output linked through debate and dialogue into the overall system for holding government to account as it proposes new legislation, the allocation of public money and new, and we hope evidence-based, policies. These issues were also tackled by the Reform Committee in its Report, and it put forward a proposal for a backbench business committee. We would emphasise that its recommendations in that area are at least as crucial to the healthy development of the select committee system as are its proposals on Chairs and membership.

3. The Liaison Committee, of course, comprises the Chairs of the House's principal select committees. Over the past decade or so we and our predecessors have actively campaigned for better resources, improved co-operation from government and a more coherent approach to the development of the select committee system within the

¹ House of Commons Reform Committee, First Report of Session 2008-09, *Rebuilding the House*, HC 117.

² *Rebuilding the House*, para 19.

³ *Rebuilding the House*, para 25.

⁴ Throughout this report we have used the Reform Committee's preferred designation of "Chair" rather than "Chairman". This does not indicate that we endorse its proposed change of nomenclature.

⁵ *Rebuilding the House*, para 163.

House's procedures. A positive response to the full range of the Reform Committee's proposals is in our view essential if an opportunity for progress on a number of issues relating to select committees which have concerned the Liaison Committee over several Parliaments is not to be missed. This brief report sets out to inform the House as it considers the Reform Committee's recommendations.

4. The Reform Committee proposes its reforms as a package, but also recommends that they be reviewed within two years of the start of the new Parliament. We recognise that the Committee has done a remarkable job to come forward with a set of recommendations in the short period of time it was given. Many of the Committee's recommendations are four-square with recommendations we have made in the past, often repeatedly. Some will not, however, command universal and unqualified support, even within the Liaison Committee. But we also recognise that doubts cannot be used as an excuse for inaction. We should be prepared to take some risks if the prize to be won is sufficient. We therefore strongly support the principle of review within two years.

2 Chairs and members

Election of Chairs

5. The Reform Committee makes two recommendations relating to how select committee Chairs are chosen:

that (for the present) the division of chairs between the parties should be based on the current system of agreement between the party managers, but with a greater degree of transparency,⁶ and

that Chairs of departmental select committees and other committees with a similar role be directly elected by secret ballot of the House.⁷

6. We support the proposal relating to the division of Chairs between the parties.

7. We recognise that election by the whole House could remove the suspicion of patronage from select committee Chairs and enhance their status both within and without the House. We do not believe that, in practice, Chairs of select committees have considered themselves beholden to the government or to their party. However, the proposal for direct elections is something of a leap in the dark, and could turn out to have unforeseen and unintended consequences. **We therefore endorse the proposal for the election of Chairs by the whole House, and agree that it should be done on the basis of the two-year experiment proposed by the Reform Committee.** Indeed we note the Reform Committee's observations that under their recommended option where the House elects Chairs, "a governing party majority could decide the outcome of elections of all Chairs".⁸ This makes it particularly important that a review should take place after the two year experiment.

8. There is some concern that the proposed change could alter the generally effective relationship between Chairs and their committees, which currently elect them from within their own membership. As the Reform Committee comments, under the current practice:

... the power of committee members to choose the Chair, although perhaps insufficiently exercised in practice, means that Chairs enjoy to some measure the confidence of their colleagues: and committees also have the power to remove a Chair.⁹

The Chair of a select committee is not in the same relationship with a committee as are the Chairs in the House or in a general committee. They are not impartial umpires applying well-established rules. They are the "political" leaders of their committees, shaping the agenda to a considerable extent and moulding an effective team. There are

⁶ *Rebuilding the House*, para 83.

⁷ *Rebuilding the House*, para 80.

⁸ *Rebuilding the House*, para 94.

⁹ *Rebuilding the House*, para 70.

few rules and they must govern by consent. At present, a select committee can, with notice, rescind its own motion to elect a Chair and replace the incumbent with an alternative member of the committee. Although there is no recent example of this happening, we think it is an important long stop provision to prevent a Chair riding roughshod over the other members of a committee or flagrantly exceeding his or her mandate. **We therefore support the Reform Committee’s suggestion of the need “to provide for the situation, should it ever arise, of a committee where the members altogether lose confidence in the elected Chair”.**¹⁰

9. The Reform Committee also recommends a system of proposing the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee on the basis of a similar electoral system (save only that any candidates must have the consent of the Prime Minister).¹¹ We recognise that this would be consistent with its other recommendations.

Appointment of members

10. The Reform Committee makes a number of interlinked recommendations about the membership of select committees:

for the election of their members within party groups acting as separate electoral colleges using systems of election validated by the Speaker, with provision for by-elections within the Parties for replacement;¹²

for the nomination of “principal” select committees to be required to be completed within six weeks of the Queen’s Speech;¹³

for ending the practice of appointing PPSs and official front bench spokesmen to select committees;¹⁴

for there to be consequences (unspecified) for “unjustified absence” from select committees.¹⁵

¹⁰ *Rebuilding the House*, para 86.

¹¹ *Rebuilding the House*, para 59.

¹² *Rebuilding the House*, paras 87-88.

¹³ *Rebuilding the House*, para 56.

¹⁴ *Rebuilding the House*, para 55.

¹⁵ *Rebuilding the House*, para 55.

Election of members

11. **We support the recommendation for the election of members of select committees in accordance with the general principles of transparency and democracy advanced by the Reform Committee.** We consider that the system proposed strikes a pragmatic and achievable balance between the current system, including the principle that the government should enjoy a majority on committees if it has a majority in the House, and the more radical proposals considered. We note and agree that, within the overall limits on size, special arrangements will be necessary to secure the participation of minor parties and independents in the work of select committees,¹⁶ which we believe to be important. It remains to be seen whether the new arrangements will deliver the key outcome of improving the quality of scrutiny, and it is therefore important that they be reviewed.

12. **We support the aim of seeking to set up the principal select committees within six weeks of the opening of a new Parliament,** which is in line with recommendations we have made in the past. We are doubtful that this ambition could be delivered by way of a Standing Order. We believe it would be most effectively achieved by a Resolution of the House, annexed to the Standing Orders, setting out clearly the requirement the House was placing on party leaders to place the necessary motion allocating Chairs to parties before the House and then to make sure that the internal party processes for selecting members will operate within the necessary timescale.

Disqualifications from membership

13. **We support the proposal for the exclusion of Ministers, opposition frontbenchers (except possibly for the smaller parties) and Parliamentary Private Secretaries from eligibility for membership of select committees.** It is clearly unsatisfactory that those on the “payroll vote” should be able to influence the scrutiny function of select committees. We would anticipate that the Speaker might decline to validate any party’s proposed electoral system if its rules did not provide that PPSs and frontbenchers were ineligible to stand.

14. We note in this context that this problem arises principally from two factors: the growth in the number of paid and unpaid ministerial and quasi-ministerial posts both in the government and in the opposition parties; and the growth in the number and size of committees. We deal with the latter matter below: in relation to the former, we note that **it would be a token of good faith in any government’s expressed wish for Parliament to be seen as independent of the executive if the steady spread of patronage were to be halted and reversed. If it does not happen voluntarily, the House should consider taking steps to enforce it.**

15. We note that both the Committee of Public Accounts and the Environmental Audit Committee have by convention had Ministers appointed to membership “ex officio” in effect. We see no impediment to the discontinuation of this convention in both cases.

¹⁶ *Rebuilding the House*, para 91.

Dismissal from membership

16. The Reform Committee recommends that there should be “clear consequences for unreasonable absence from select committees” but is not more specific. We agree with the principle and propose that, **to fit in with the proposed new system of elections, any member of a select committee whose cumulative attendance during a Session is below 60% should be automatically discharged at the end of that Session on the basis of a report made by the Clerk of Committees to the Speaker. The Speaker would have discretion to waive the application of the rule in cases such as ill-health, etc. New elections should be held to fill the vacancies so created within two weeks of the opening of the next Session.**

3 Size, number and role of select committees

Size of committees

17. The Reform Committee recommends a reduction in size of membership of standard departmental select committees to “not more than 11”.¹⁷

18. **We support the proposal to reduce the average size of select committees.** The enlargement of a number of committees to fourteen members at the start of this Parliament was done without consultation. The declared intention was to widen opportunities for participation. This was a misconception: on a committee of fourteen it is well-nigh impossible for all members to participate effectively in the examination of witnesses; and even in private deliberation the influence of each is weakened. This leads to disengagement. In practice we find that enlargement has tended to weaken the internal cohesion of committees and has added to the difficulties of finding Members to serve on them. Some of those that are put on committees appear to regard it as an involuntary burden and demonstrate this attitude through poor attendance.

19. In our most recent Sessional Report, we noted that the standard membership of many committees has risen over 30 years from 9 to 14 and the total number of places on select committees from 260 to 515.¹⁸ We concluded:

An end to unilateral action to increase committee sizes is required. In its place, there should be consultation between the Whips and committee chairmen with the aim of adjustment downward in the size of some committees no later than the start of the next Parliament.

We are pleased that the Government has agreed to consider proposing this at the beginning of the new Parliament.¹⁹ On this basis, we assume that the Government will also support the recommendation from the Reform Committee.

Number of committees

20. The Reform Committee recommends a reduction in the number of select committees, “ending overlapping or duplicate remit and rationing the scarce resource of Members’ time and commitment”.²⁰

21. This proposal is closely linked to the recommendation on reducing the size of committees. Membership of a select committee should involve a significant commitment of time and energy. The proliferation of select committees in recent years

¹⁷ *Rebuilding the House*, para 55.

¹⁸ Liaison Committee, *The Work of Committees in 2007-08*, First Report of Session 2008-09, HC291, para 78.

¹⁹ Liaison Committee *The Work of Committees in 2007-08: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report of Session 2008-09*, HC 805, para 6.

²⁰ *Rebuilding the House*, para 55.

has reached a point where we feel that this commitment is too thinly spread. In particular we see a growing risk that increased responsibilities, and more and larger committees may result in the perverse outcome of an overall decrease in the quality of Parliament's scrutiny of government. **We support the proposal to rationalise the number of select committees.**

22. A rationalisation of committee structures can best be implemented in the new Parliament once the structure of Whitehall Departments has been confirmed. One of the fundamental tenets of the departmental committee structure is that there should be a one-to-one "marking" of government departments by committees. This is key to the effectiveness of the system: it means that every aspect of government activity is liable to scrutiny by a reasonably expert body of backbenchers.

23. However, the growing tendency to tinker continually with the machinery of government has meant that departmental committees have themselves been subject to a process of constant revision of remits, dissolutions, mergers and demergers. Higher education, which has been scrutinised by three different committees since 2006, is just one example. The Public Administration Committee has reported adversely on this tendency and has made recommendations about parliamentary involvement in changes to the machinery of government.²¹ Even if that Committee's recommendations for decoupling statutory departmental responsibilities from ministerial posts is not to be realised, it may be time to re-examine the committee structure to consider whether the principle of scrutiny across the waterfront of government activity could be reconciled with a structure less at the mercy of changes to the Cabinet structure. We leave this for further consideration by our successors.

24. More immediately, it is a major theme of the Reform Committee's report that the House itself has no power of initiative in the setting-up or winding-up of select committees.²² Its proposals for "House business" and for a backbench business committee would go some way to addressing this deficit, which is one reason we support those recommendations. It would enable the Liaison Committee, or individual committees, to bring forward proposals for changing the standing orders relating to select committees, or other matters concerning select committees, on their own initiative.

25. In some circumstances the power of initiative will remain with the government. **We consider that no proposal for changing the Standing Orders relating to select committees should be able to be moved by a Minister unless the Liaison Committee had been consulted and given time to report its views on the proposals to the House.** We note that the House will in any event have to come to a view on any changes to the structure of select committees before the election/nomination process unfolds.

²¹ Public Administration Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2006-07, *Machinery of Government changes*, HC 672; Third Special Report of Session 2007-08, Government Response, HC 90; First Report of Session 2007-08, *Machinery of Government changes: A follow-up Report*, HC 160; Eighth Report of Session 2007-08, *Machinery of Government changes: Further Report*, HC 514.

²² *Rebuilding the House*, paras 9, 140-144.

Role of committees

26. The Reform Committee recommends that “the Liaison Committee should re-examine the current role of select committees, their resources and their tasks, and in particular how to deal with the increasing demands of time made of Members as their role grows”.²³

27. This recommendation would seem to be directed to the issue of the role and tasks of committees, and the availability of Members’ time. We already have the Core Tasks and these can be amended where appropriate. As to staff resources, these, as suggested by our Chairman, are already reviewed every five years, most recently in 2007-08. We realise that we are likely to be approaching an era of greater budget stringency. But it would be a mistake to deplete the resources of select committees or freeze these regardless of the tasks they are required to perform. Select committees are in the front line of parliamentary accountability, and their resources should be given appropriate priority wherever it is possible to gain the necessary efficiencies from other areas of operation of the House permanent service. They are the teeth, not the tail, and if difficult decisions have to be made, those responsible for them should not fall back on the easy solution of across the board cuts.

28. The theme of increasing demands on the limited time available for committee work has been a familiar one for us, and was indeed highlighted in the final paragraph of our last Sessional Report.²⁴ We intend to consider the issues raised by the recommendation and report further in due course.

²³ *Rebuilding the House*, para 93.

²⁴ Liaison Committee, *The Work of Committees in 2007-08*, First Report of Session 2008-09, HC291, para 127.

4 Setting the agenda

A new way of setting the agenda

29. At present, select committees have the right to three “Estimates days” on the floor of the House and to at least six Thursday three-hour adjournment debates in Westminster Hall.²⁵ The Liaison Committee decides which reports from committees should be debated at these times. Under the Reform Committee’s proposals for the way in which the agenda of the House should be set, involving the creation of time for “House business” and a backbench business committee, select committees would in practice be given wider opportunities to be engaged in debates in the House.

30. The Reform Committee rightly points out that the slots currently available are rather inflexible (three hours is not always the right length of time: often thirty or ninety minutes would be more appropriate; occasionally a full day’s debate might be justified) and the motions on which debate arises are also rather unspecific (being either a supply resolution or “has considered” motion or an adjournment motion in Westminster Hall). The proposals for House business would enable both more flexible use of time by select committees (including, for example, “topical debates” relating to select committee reports) and the opportunity for debates to take place on substantive motions from select committees. A substantive motion could be either directly effective (for example in the case of motions to alter the standing orders) or politically effective; if the House supported a proposal by a select committee the government could not simply brush it aside. **We welcome and endorse the proposals for the creation of “House time” controlled by a backbench business committee as a major opportunity to change the balance of power between Parliament and the Executive.**

31. The Reform Committee also made two specific suggestions for ways in which select committees could attain a higher profile in the agenda of the House. We consider these below, while noting that the most important shift would be to House time and how that time would be best used would be for experiment and organic development.

Estimates days and scrutiny of expenditure

32. The Reform Committee has specifically endorsed the recommendations in our recent report on scrutiny of public money for increasing from three to five the number of Estimates Days and for allowing substantive motions on expenditure plans.²⁶ In that Report the Committee welcomed the Government’s Alignment Project, which we consider will make it easier for the House and its select committees to follow the way public money is allocated and spent. We look forward to the continuation of discussions as to how the process of examining expenditure is best reflected in House proceedings, including how it is integrated with the improved processes for establishing non-Executive control over House business.

²⁵ In practice the number of Thursday debates in Westminster Hall has always been greater than this, but the additional days are effectively in the gift of the government through the Chairman of Ways and Means.

²⁶ *Rebuilding the House*, paras 137-138.

“Ten-minute rule” report presentations

33. The Reform Committee suggested, as an example of the kind of business that might be determined by the backbench business committee, brief presentation of committee reports in the Chamber by the Chairman and one or two Members, “without it engaging instant rebuttal by Ministers”.²⁷

34. We are attracted by the idea behind this proposal, which would connect committees more closely to the Chamber and provide welcome extra publicity for Reports. However, the Reform Committee’s rider to the scheme demonstrates the potential risks. Ministers and their departments should take seriously the recommendations in a Report and provide a considered response to them within the two months set under existing conventions. An arrangement within a more confrontational framework in the Chamber that encouraged ill-considered responses could bring an undesirable element of Punch and Judy politics to the work of select committees. It would be for the backbench business committee to monitor any such experiment carefully.

²⁷ *Rebuilding the House*, para 221.

5 Involving the public

Select committees and the public

35. It is important to recognise, as the Reform Committee acknowledged,²⁸ that select committees play a central and increasing role in involving the public in the work of the House and in what has come to be called “outreach”. Direct engagement with the public—through taking public evidence from outside organisations and individuals, conducting visits around the country, responding to correspondence etc—lies at the centre of select committee work in a way which is not (inevitably) the case for the Chamber or even for the legislative process. ‘Involving the public’ is nothing new for select committees. Nonetheless, we believe that the proposals to put the select committees more firmly at the heart of the House’s agenda will do much to strengthen public engagement and participation.

36. Select committees are increasingly involved in the pre-legislative scrutiny of draft bills, examination of legislative proposals (not just bills but various forms of delegated and European legislation) and the post-legislative scrutiny of the laws the House has made. In all these functions they have a crucial role to play, alongside the suggestions made by the Reform Committee, in involving the public in the legislative process. They have a long history of doing so; no doubt they could do it even better given the time and resources and the opportunity to have the ear of the House.

Petitions

37. The Reform Committee made a series of recommendations for increasing the seriousness with which the House considers petitions from the public. Their proposals include giving a new role to the Procedure Committee in this respect, including giving it power to refer petitions to other select committees.²⁹

38. Select committees already receive petitions presented to the House, and use them to inform current business; not infrequently the subject-matter of a petition will coincide with issues the committee is already investigating. There is no common view within the Liaison Committee on how far their engagement with petitions, for example by formal referral, can be taken further forward effectively. There is some scepticism about previous attempts to involve the select committees more in the treatment of petitions. Any scheme implemented should not impose substantial extra duties on departmental select committees, but we are confident that the Procedure Committee could exercise appropriate discretion in this respect. We would expect the select committees to give the experiment proposed a fair wind.

²⁸ *Rebuilding the House*, para 241.

²⁹ *Rebuilding the House*, para 263.

6 Conclusion

39. In bringing together thirty-two Chairmen of the House's select committees, the Liaison Committee can speak with authority on behalf of those who have first-hand experience of operating the House's scrutiny function. The Reform Committee has taken account of our views, which we welcome. In particular, we believe that its proposals for allowing select committees greater influence over and access to the agenda of the House are critical to sustaining the vigour and effectiveness of our scrutiny of government.

40. The House now has an opportunity to make these proposals a reality in the new Parliament. We urge it to act courageously.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. We support the proposal relating to the division of Chairs between the parties. (Paragraph 6)
2. We endorse the proposal for the election of Chairs by the whole House, and agree that it should be done on the basis of the two-year experiment proposed by the Reform Committee. (Paragraph 7)
3. We support the Reform Committee's suggestion of the need "to provide for the situation, should it ever arise, of a committee where the members altogether lose confidence in the elected Chair". (Paragraph 8)
4. We support the recommendation for the election of members of select committees in accordance with the general principles of transparency and democracy advanced by the Reform Committee. (Paragraph 11)
5. We support the aim of seeking to set up the principal select committees within six weeks of the opening of a new Parliament. (Paragraph 12)
6. We support the proposal for the exclusion of Ministers, opposition frontbenchers (except possibly for the smaller parties) and Parliamentary Private Secretaries from eligibility for membership of select committees. (Paragraph 13)
7. It would be a token of good faith in any government's expressed wish for Parliament to be seen as independent of the executive if the steady spread of patronage were to be halted and reversed. If it does not happen voluntarily, the House should consider taking steps to enforce it. (Paragraph 14)
8. To fit in with the proposed new system of elections, any member of a select committee whose cumulative attendance during a Session is below 60% should be automatically discharged at the end of that Session on the basis of a report made by the Clerk of Committees to the Speaker. The Speaker would have discretion to waive the application of the rule in cases such as ill-health, etc. New elections should be held to fill the vacancies so created within two weeks of the opening of the next Session. (Paragraph 16)
9. We support the proposal to reduce the average size of select committees. (Paragraph 18)
10. We support the proposal to rationalise the number of select committees. (Paragraph 21)
11. We consider that no proposal for changing the Standing Orders relating to select committees should be able to be moved by a Minister unless the Liaison Committee had been consulted and given time to report its views on the proposals to the House. (Paragraph 25)

12. We welcome and endorse the proposals for the creation of “House time” controlled by a backbench business committee as a major opportunity to change the balance of power between Parliament and the Executive. (Paragraph 30)

Formal Minutes

Thursday 14 January 2010

Members present:

Mr Alan Williams, in the Chair

Mr James Arbuthnot	Mr Edward Leigh
Sir Alan Beith	Peter Luff
Michael Connarty	Andrew Miller
Mr Andrew Dismore	Mr Barry Sheerman
Mrs Louise Ellman	Dr Phyllis Starkey
Mike Gapes	Keith Vaz
Mr Michael Jack	Mr John Whittingdale

Draft Report (Rebuilding the House: Select Committee Issues), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 5 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 6 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 7 read.

Amendment proposed, in line 6, to leave out from “consequences.” to “Indeed” in line 8.—(*Mike Gapes*)

Question put, That the Amendment be made.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 6	Noes, 7
Mr James Arbuthnot	Sir Alan Beith
Mike Gapes	Michael Connarty
Andrew Miller	Mr Andrew Dismore
Dr Phyllis Starkey	Mrs Louise Ellman
Keith Vaz	Mr Michael Jack
Mr John Whittingdale	Mr Edward Leigh
	Mr Barry Sheerman

Paragraph agreed to.

Paragraph 8 read, as follows:

“We support the recommendation of the Reform Committee that, at least in the first phase, this arrangement should apply only to the departmental select committees, the Committee of Public Accounts, the Public Administration Committee and the Environmental Audit Committee (or their equivalents under any new committee structure).”

Paragraph disagreed to.

Paragraphs 9 to 41 (now paragraphs 8 to 40) read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report, as amended, be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Thursday 28 January at 9.30 am

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

Session 2008–09

First Report	The work of committees in 2007-08	HC 291
Second Report	Financial Scrutiny: Parliamentary Control over Government Budgets	HC 804
First Special Report	The work of committees in 2007-08: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2008-09	HC 805
Second Special Report	Financial Scrutiny: Parliamentary Control over Government Budgets: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2008-09	HC 1074

Session 2007–08

First Report	Pre-appointment hearings by select committees	HC 384
Second Report	Parliament and Government Finance: Recreating Financial Security	HC 426
Third Report	The work of committees in 2007	HC 427
First Special Report	Pre-appointment hearings by select committees: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2007-08	HC 594
Second Special Report	The work of committees in 2007: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2007-08	HC 595
Third Special Report	Parliament and Government Finance: Recreating Financial Security: Government and National Audit Office Responses to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2007-08	HC 1108
Fourth Special Report	Planning Bill: Parliamentary Scrutiny of National Policy Statements	HC 1109
Fifth Special Report	Modernisation of language in standing orders relating to select committees	HC 1110

Session 2006–07

First Report	Annual Report for 2005–06	HC 406
First Special Report	Annual Report for 2005–06: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2006–07	HC 920

Session 2005–06

First Report	Government Reply to the Annual Report for 2004	HC 855
Second Report	A New Publication Order for Select Committee Evidence	HC 1271

Third Report

Estimates Memoranda

HC 1685