



House of Commons
Committee of Public Accounts

Committee of Public Accounts: Proposed changes to Standing Order No.148

**First Special Report of Session
2010–11**

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 27 July 2010*

The Committee of Public Accounts

Rt Hon Margaret Hodge (*Labour, Barking*) (Chair)
Mr Richard Bacon (*Conservative, South Norfolk*)
Mr Stephen Barclay (*Conservative, North East Cambridgeshire*)
Jackie Doyle-Price (*Conservative, Thurrock*)
Justine Greening (*Conservative, Putney*)
Matthew Hancock (*Conservative, West Suffolk*)
Chris Heaton-Harris (*Conservative, Daventry*)
Joseph Johnson (*Conservative, Orpington*)
Eric Joyce (*Labour, Falkirk*)
Rt Hon Mrs Anne McGuire (*Labour, Stirling*)
Mr Austin Mitchell (*Labour, Great Grimsby*)
Nick Smith (*Labour, Blaenau Gwent*)
Ian Swales (*Liberal Democrats, Redcar*)
James Wharton (*Conservative, Stockton South*)

Powers

Powers of the Committee of Public Accounts are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 148. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

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/pac>. A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Session is at the back of this volume.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee is Dr John Patterson (Clerk), Lori Verwaerde (Senior Committee Assistant), Jane Lauder and Pam Morris (Committee Assistants) and Alex Paterson (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk, Committee of Public Accounts, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5708; the Committee's email address is pubaccom@parliament.uk.

Special Report

1. Following the election of the Chair on 9 June, the remaining members of the Committee for the new Parliament were nominated by the House on 12 July.
2. We have identified two standing order constraints and are proposing that these should be remedied without delay. A draft Motion for this purpose has been drawn up and is annexed to this report.
3. The first proposed change relates to our present inability to sit when the House is adjourned. This power, which is available to other select committees,¹ has meant that we have had to rearrange, at short notice, a session of evidence scheduled originally for Wednesday 28 July which has subsequently turned out to be after the House rises. This proposed change would be entirely appropriate and give us the flexibility available to other select committees of the House.
4. The second proposed change also relates to a power available to other select committees but not to this committee, namely, the power to appoint Specialist Advisors.
5. This committee has drawn for many years upon the value for money reports published by the Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) in devising its schedule of work. Indeed, the C&AG is required to take account of the views of this committee.² We envisage continuing to work closely with the C&AG and his staff.
6. This new Parliament has provided an opportunity for change and renewal across the House and we, too, wish to consider innovative approaches to our tasks. We may, for example, wish to take evidence on matters within the terms of our Standing Orders but which are apart from the C&AG's value for money reports. To that end, it will be essential to be able to draw on independent technical advice available through one or more Specialist Advisors.
7. The Chair of the Committee proposes to write to Natascha Engel MP, Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, explaining the position of the committee on these two matters and seeking time on the floor of the House for approval of the proposed Standing Order changes as a matter of priority in the Autumn.

1 For the Departmental select committees this power is contained in Standing Order No. 152(4)

2 National Audit Act 1983, Section 1(3)

Annex

Mrs Margaret Hodge

[other members]

Committee of Public Accounts (amendment of Standing Orders)

That Standing Order No. 148 (Committee of Public Accounts) be amended in paragraph (1) as follows:—

(1) in line 7 after ‘records’ insert ‘, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House’;
and

(2) in line 8 after ‘time to time,’ insert ‘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,’.