



House of Commons  
Procedure Committee

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# Private Members' bills

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Third Report of Session 2015–16





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**Third Report of Session 2015–16**

*Report, together with formal minutes  
relating to the report*

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## Procedure Committee

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

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Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Martyn Atkins (Clerk), Katya Cassidy (Second Clerk), Jim Lawford (Committee Assistant), and Liz Parratt (Media Officer).

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# Contents

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<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2 Background</b>	<b>7</b>
Our predecessors' inquiry and reports	7
<b>3 Where the present process fails</b>	<b>9</b>
A misleading and opaque process	10
Obstacles to a bill's progress: 'talking out'	11
<b>4 Recommendations for reform</b>	<b>14</b>
A guaranteed vote on second reading	14
Prioritising certain bills on merit	15
Consequences for the Backbench Business Committee	17
The ballot	17
Demonstrating support for a bill	19
Clarifying the status of bills	19
A decision by the House on the Committee's proposals	21
Time for consideration of private Members' bills	21
<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Formal Minutes</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Witnesses</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Published written evidence</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Unpublished written evidence</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament</b>	<b>30</b>



## Summary

The Procedure Committee has reviewed private Members' bill (PMB) procedure, taking into account the two reports on the subject produced by the Committee in the 2010–15 Parliament and the experience of the PMB process in the 2015–16 Session.

The Committee in the last Parliament undertook an exhaustive review of the process: following discussions with Government on its initial findings, the predecessor Committee recommended that a convention be established that there should be a vote on second reading of a PMB following a full day's debate. The Government did not find time for this recommendation to be debated before the end of the last Parliament. This Committee has therefore examined the matter afresh in order to propose workable solutions.

In the absence of any such solutions, it seems less likely that the present arrangements for considering backbench legislation on sitting Fridays will regain the waning confidence of Members, still less of the public: priority time for backbench legislation might as a consequence be moved to midweek days, or might face abolition. In either case the present opportunities for backbenchers to initiate legislation would be compromised. This would be very unfortunate: we regard as crucial the right of backbenchers to have meaningful and substantive opportunities to initiate legislation, although we consider that such proposals should be subject to high standards of scrutiny.

The Committee has identified two fundamental problems with the present process: (a) a lack of transparency over the procedures and their use for political campaigning as opposed to genuine legislative change, and (b) the use of delaying tactics to frustrate genuine debate and decision on measures. While the PMB process can engender serious and measured debate on significant issues, this is increasingly the exception rather than the rule. On several occasions during this session alone, delaying tactics have been used to starve bills of parliamentary time, to the frustration of those who took a genuine interest in the progress of the legislation. This reflects very badly on the House's image: it is, in the words of one Member, "a problem which it is in everybody's interest to solve".

The answer lies in measures which will encourage substantial and well-prepared legislative proposals to be brought forward for priority consideration on Fridays. If sitting Fridays are to continue as days on which private Members' bills have precedence, then the system for assigning priority to bills must ensure that the bills to be debated are those which engage the active interest of a substantial number of Members. If Members stay away from the House in large numbers on sitting Fridays, then the resulting vacuum is inevitably filled by those prepared to use tactical measures to obstruct the progress of less well-supported proposals.

The Committee therefore proposes incremental changes to the existing system, aimed at retaining the sitting Friday but introducing a new element to the selection of bills. The Committee recommends that the total number of bills selected for priority consideration be reduced from 20 to 14. Of those 14 slots, up to four are to be filled by bills to be chosen on their merits by the Backbench Business Committee on the basis of substantial evidence both of preparation and prior scrutiny and of broad support

for such measures inside and outside the House. These bills will be given priority; the remaining slots will then be filled by bills presented by Members chosen through the ballot, as at present.

The Committee proposes that Standing Orders be changed to ensure that, for the first seven sitting Fridays of a session, debate on the second reading of a bill which has lasted the whole sitting should be concluded with a vote. This provision would provide the certainty necessary for the Chair to introduce speech limits in such debates, if required.

The Committee restates a number of recommendations for technical change made by the Committee in the last Parliament. These amendments to the process are intended to make the process more comprehensible, for example by ensuring that only those bills which have actually been printed are routinely listed on the Order Paper.

The Committee also recommends that private Members' bills should in future be called 'backbench bills'.

The Committee makes no recommendation, for the present, on changes to sitting hours or on moving PMBs to another day of the week. The Committee will shortly survey the views of Members on the overall sitting hours of the House and will bring forward proposals which will allow the House to give its view on the hours on which it should sit.

Should the Committee's recommendations for private Members' bills not be implemented, or fail to achieve their objectives for sitting Fridays, then it is highly likely that the question of the scheduling of such bills will have to be revisited. To move consideration of bills to days when the Government can rely on its supporters to vote in more substantial numbers is not, however, a step to be undertaken lightly.

The Committee seeks early implementation of those measures which require administrative action only. For measures which require changes to Standing Orders, or an expression of opinion by the House, it expects the Government to provide an early opportunity, in Government time, for the House to debate and come to a decision on these proposals. This would allow the substantive changes on the selection of bills to be piloted from the start of the 2017–18 Session.

# 1 Introduction

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1. The process in the House of Commons for considering and deciding upon the merits of legislation proposed by any Member other than a Minister is in danger of appearing broken and discredited. Many now believe that, on the whole, the way the process is operated does more harm to the reputation of the House than good, and that it is not now suitable for the purpose for which it was intended.<sup>1</sup>

2. The Procedure Committee in the last Parliament produced two reports on private Members' bills (hereafter "PMBs") in the 2013–14 Session.<sup>2</sup> In its legacy report of March 2015 that Committee asserted that there was "a clear desire across the House for change" in the handling of PMBs on sitting Fridays:

We hope that our successors in the new Parliament will build on the considerable amount of work which we have done towards securing meaningful reform to ensure that desire for change is satisfied.<sup>3</sup>

In the light of continuing dissatisfaction, both within the House and among the general public, about the adequacy of procedures for the passage of legislation originating from backbenchers, we have taken up our predecessors' invitation further to examine procedure on PMBs. In this report we set out firm proposals for reforms designed to improve the operation of private Members' bill procedures, and thus to increase their effectiveness in testing the merits of backbench proposals.

3. We published our formal call for evidence on 7 January 2016. In the light of our predecessors' recommendations, we undertook to examine the following issues:

- Whether the present procedures provide for an adequate balance between the right of a backbench Member to secure progress for a bill which has support in the House and the rights of individual Members to block the passage of legislation with which they disagree;
- Whether it is appropriate for Ministers to use the existing procedures of the House to prevent the progress of bills which have support in the House;
- Whether the present powers of the Chair to impose time limits on speeches in the interests of the progress of business should be used in respect of private Members' bills;
- Whether the existing ballot arrangements which give certain Members priority in sponsoring bills at Second Reading and beyond are appropriate;
- Whether PMBs should continue to be considered on certain Fridays, and, if not, what other arrangements might be made for consideration of such bills on the floor of the House or elsewhere;

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1 See, for example, evidence submitted by members of the public ([PMB 01](#), [02](#), [03](#), [05](#), [08](#) and [14](#)) and survey evidence submitted by 38 Degrees ([PMB 19](#)). See also the Westminster Hall debate on the motion 'That this House has considered the procedure for debating and voting on Private Members' Bills' of 13 April 2016: HC Deb, 13 April 2016, [cols 85–110WH](#).

2 Procedure Committee, Second Report of Session 2013–14, [Private Members' bills](#), HC 188, and Fifth Report of Session 2013–14, [Private Members' bills: Government response and revised proposals](#), HC 1171.

3 Procedure Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2014–15, [Matters for the Procedure Committee in the 2015 Parliament](#), HC 1121, paras 11–14

- How the practice on moving motions 'That the House sit in private' (invariably used tactically on sitting Fridays) should be reformed.

4. We took oral evidence from print and broadcast journalists (Isabel Hardman of The Spectator, Mark D'Arcy of BBC News and Michael White of The Guardian), Members who had sponsored, and opposed, bills in the present Session, members of the Committee in the last Parliament who had participated in our predecessors' inquiry, the Clerk of the House and the Clerk of Private Members' Bills, the Director of the Hansard Society, and the Leader and Shadow Leader of the House. We received 17 written memoranda and had access to the oral and written evidence reported to the House by our predecessors. We are very grateful to all those who gave oral evidence or submitted written evidence.

## 2 Background

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### Our predecessors' inquiry and reports

5. The Procedure Committee in the previous Parliament inquired into the PMB procedure in exhaustive detail. In its initial report, published in September 2013, it set out a number of proposals for reform of the process.<sup>4</sup> The Government responded in December 2013, generally accepting that Committee's recommendations which aimed to increase transparency and the comprehensibility of the system.<sup>5</sup> It nevertheless rejected a key recommendation—that it should be possible to 'programme'—or timetable the progress of—a private Member's bill.

6. The Committee thought that it ought to be possible to set a specific end time for debates, to ensure that the further progress of a bill could be tested, if necessary, through a vote in the House. Without this provision, a Member in charge of a bill has to rely on being called to debate their proposal sufficiently early on a PMB Friday that the Chair may accept a motion for the closure, and allow a vote on the proposal, after a full debate. If the closure is opposed, the Member in charge also needs to muster 99 further supporters, and two further members to act as tellers in any division, to stay on that Friday—far more than the number of Members likely to have any chance of being called in the debate.

7. Following discussions with the then Leader of the House,<sup>6</sup> and an evident lack of support from within the Government, our predecessors decided not to proceed further with the full package of proposals for 'programming' of PMBs. That Committee instead recommended that 'the House should agree that there should be a convention that the question on second reading of a private Member's bill should be put to the House at the end of a full day's debate'.<sup>7</sup> It also recommended, or repeated recommendations for, technical proposals designed to bring more certainty and clarity to the Order Paper.

8. Our predecessors were extremely disappointed that, in the light of the lengthy discussions held to agree a way forward, the previous administration did not find time to allow the House to debate and decide upon the revised proposals, which we consider represented a measured and sensible reform. We share their concern, and therefore return to the issue in an attempt to bring greater credibility to an increasingly discredited process.

**9. We endorse the general principles which underlie our predecessor Committee's two reports on private Members' bills. We too find it regrettable that successive administrations have not responded effectively to concerns about the process, even when workable solutions have been proposed. The proposals in this report provide an opportunity for a new beginning to the PMBs process which, as it presently operates, brings increasing discredit on the House because of the way it is now largely reduced to an exercise in futility.**

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4 Procedure Committee, Second Report of Session 2013–14, [Private Members' bills](#), HC 188

5 Procedure Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2013–14, [Private Members' bills: Government response and revised proposals](#), HC 1171, Appendix.

6 Rt Hon William Hague MP, now Lord Hague of Richmond

7 Procedure Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2013–14, [Private Members' bills: Government response and revised proposals](#), HC 1171, para 6.

10. We acknowledge that there are calls for the thirteen sitting Fridays devoted to PMBs to be abolished and for all Fridays to be designated formally as constituency days.<sup>8</sup> If Friday sittings were done away with, and no alternative time for consideration of PMBs made available, backbenchers would of course have no more than a symbolic route to initiate legislation through presentation bills and bills introduced under the ten minute rule.

11. While this is not a change which we can advocate at present, there can be little future for a process which, unreformed, can be so visibly susceptible to sabotage. In our recommendations we have tried to strike a balance, offering a number of implementable reforms which will increase transparency and purposefulness and begin to restore some public and parliamentary confidence to the process.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, evidence from Professor Sarah Childs (PMB 10).

### 3 Where the present process fails

12. There are two fundamental problems with the PMB process as it operates at present. Our chief concern is the lack of transparency: the process is impenetrable to the general public and too often brings Parliament into disrepute. Our second concern is that it is now extremely difficult for a genuine private Member's bill of any kind to reach the statute book. Increasingly, this is not because the House as a whole has decided that a bill should not progress, but because a small number of Members opposed to a measure can effectively veto it.

13. We do not start from the assumption that it would be desirable for more legislation to be made. We recognise the Government's overall concern for the integrity of statute, and we acknowledge its responsibility for the coherence of the statute book.<sup>9</sup> For a small and unrepresentative minority of Members to be given a free pass to the enactment of poorly-considered and unworkable legislation would be damaging to Parliament's standing. But a process which purports to allow backbench Members to introduce legislation, and yet does not provide the House with a reasonable opportunity to make a decision on whether such legislation should pass into law, misleads our constituents as to its purpose. By disempowering the legislature they have elected, it breeds cynicism and disengagement in both the representatives and those they represent.

14. Members of the public who have contributed to this inquiry have described the effect which certain practices have on their view of the House. One stated that the practice of speaking at length to obstruct a bill's progress "makes me feel like giving up on Westminster".<sup>10</sup> Another referred to this practice as "a great disappointment to the general public".<sup>11</sup> Mr John Cresswell-Plant, a seasoned observer of the process, reminded us of the reputational impact on the House of these practices.<sup>12</sup> Comments relayed to us by a campaigning organisation indicate substantial dissatisfaction with a process which can apparently be easily gamed to frustrate any substantive consideration of legislative proposals.<sup>13</sup>

15. Friday sittings can, on occasion, be the setting for debates which demonstrate the strengths of the legislative process. The first bill to be debated on a Friday in this session—the Assisted Dying (No. 2) Bill—concerned an issue of conscience on which no Government would venture to introduce legislation.<sup>14</sup> 85 members had expressed a desire to speak, and 57 were called, following advice from the Chair on the desirable maximum length of speeches.<sup>15</sup> After over five hours of debate, 448 votes were cast, and the House denied a second reading to the Bill. Yet the prevailing experience of Fridays is of a moribund legislative process which evokes bafflement or indignation. A bill's progress should be arrested not because a small number of Members have talked at length to delay its passage, but because all Members of the House have had the opportunity to decide on it.

9 Procedure Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2013–14, [Private Members' bills: Government response and revised proposals](#), HC 1171, Appendix.

10 Mr Philip Haggart [\[PMB 01\]](#)

11 Robert Parker MNI [\[PMB 08\]](#)

12 Mr John Cresswell-Plant [\[PMB 14\]](#)

13 38 Degrees [\[PMB 19\]](#)

14 Dignity in Dying [\[PMB 12\]](#)

15 HC Deb, 11 September 2015, [col 656 ff](#)

## A misleading and opaque process

16. The PMB process, as it currently stands, is confusing to the public. Whereas Government bills progress through the stages of Parliamentary scrutiny and amendment and into law with a high degree of predictability, the same cannot be said for private Members' bills introduced in the Commons or brought from the Lords. The previous Committee's initial report set out the four main reasons for a backbench Member to bring forward a bill: as a chance to raise an issue or to "fly a kite"; to start a campaign for a change in the law; to make small and uncontroversial changes to the law supported—or at least not actively opposed—by the Government; and as a genuine attempt at substantive legislative change. In all these cases, backbench members are often giving voice to a substantial public desire for change—and often for change which is not actively being instigated by any of the dominant political parties.

17. The evidence we have received suggests that the public often view the process primarily as a means to facilitate substantial legislative change brought forward from outside—and often in spite of—Government.<sup>16</sup> Many see private Members' Fridays as territory where party discipline is relaxed and where Members may more freely vote according to their consciences.

18. The experience within the House is rather more complicated. Members successful in the PMB ballot, and relatively highly placed, may decide to use the opportunity to present bills on issues which are political priorities for them or which have been suggested to them by third party campaigning organisations. Members, particularly on the Government side, are frequently approached by Departments looking for opportunities to progress minor and uncontroversial legislative changes which are necessary but would not generally merit slots in the Government's legislative programme.

19. Second readings of ballot bills effectively have precedence on the first seven sitting Fridays of a session: on the eighth and subsequent Fridays precedence is given to bills roughly in the order in which they are closest to success. But if, after the seventh Friday, there are no bills which have received a second reading, and other ballot bills have been talked out, defeated or withdrawn, PMBs which have reached the Order Paper as presentation bills or bills introduced under the ten minute rule may be in a position to receive substantive consideration. Such bills which are set down for debate, whatever their merits, have only the faintest chance of receiving a second reading, let alone progressing to the Lords, unless they have the active support of the Government: it is disingenuous to suggest that any such bills which do not have some form of Government backing have the slightest chance of becoming law.

20. One of the most baffling aspects of current procedural arrangements is that dozens of such bills are listed on the later Fridays of a session, most, or sometimes all, of which have scant chance of being debated, still less decided upon, and even less of making further progress. We remain concerned about the number of bills on the Order Paper which have little or no chance of progressing. Many of these never have an existence beyond their "long title"—on the surface they appear to be bills but in reality they have not been drafted. Many never will be drafted. A long list of titles set down for debate on any given

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Mr John Cresswell-Plant [[PMB 14](#)].

Friday, along with the fact that any bill which is not to be taken as first or second order of the day has very little chance of being debated, perpetuates the confusion of the public as to what will happen to any given bill. Mark D'Arcy told us that

You see people who flatly do not understand the process. I have had people complain to me when I have said that this Bill now has little chance of becoming law—a frequently used pay-off line in “Today in Parliament”. I get stiff letters saying, “We have been assured that this Bill is on the agenda in three weeks’ time.” Yes, it is but it is number 23, so it is not going to be reached, but they do not understand that.<sup>17</sup>

21. As many of us have found, Members are very frequently lobbied by constituents and others with requests to be present at Westminster on a sitting Friday to support bills which have little if any chance of being debated and even less of reaching the statute book. Isabel Hardman noted that

It is very tempting for MPs and lobbying organisations to exaggerate in press releases to constituents or supporters the amount of power that they have. Saying, “Support my Bill, which will enable this,” is much better than saying, “I’ve got a debate that actually won’t involve much debate of my proposal anyway”.<sup>18</sup>

We set out in the chapter below a number of proposals, largely endorsing the recommendations of our predecessors, which are intended to have the effect of winnowing out genuine legislative proposals from campaigning political statements which purport to be draft legislation.

### Obstacles to a bill's progress: 'talking out'

22. In the absence of a defined end time for a debate, opponents of a measure may seek to frustrate the bill's progress by the exercise of procedural devices, such as

- moving that the House sit in private;
- speaking at inordinate length on the bill to ensure that the debate cannot conclude before the 'moment of interruption' ('talking the bill out');
- opposing the closure, in the hope that the Bill's supporters will not be able to muster the number required to secure it; and
- speaking at length on uncontroversial preceding business, to reduce the opportunity for the opposed measure to be debated.

23. While such tactics by opponents of a bill may be exercised without infringing procedural rules, they rely on gaming those rules rather than winning an argument on a vote. As we have indicated above, it is easy for a small number of Members to thwart a bill's progress and deny the House an opportunity to come to a decision, often by speaking at great length on matters not closely related to the merits or otherwise of the bill under discussion.

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<sup>17</sup> Q4 [Mark D'Arcy]

<sup>18</sup> Q5 [Isabel Hardman]

24. The practice of 'talking out' ballot bills has caused controversy on several occasions in this Session:

- Following the debate on the Hospital Parking Charges (Exemption for Carers) Bill on 30 October 2015, which was talked out at 2.30 pm by a Minister following a lengthy contribution in opposition from Philip Davies MP, e-petition 111441 was registered on the House's e-petition site calling for the House to 'reform the rules on filibustering or 'talking a bill to death': it has received over 50,000 signatures.<sup>19</sup>
- The Off-patent Drugs Bill was the second bill to be debated on Friday 6 November, the first bill being an uncontroversial 'handout' bill originating in a Government department on which Members nevertheless spoke at considerable length. When debate on the second bill started at 1.08 pm, 9 members spoke in favour, for a total of 55 minutes, and none spoke against. The Minister rose at 2.03 pm and in the course of his remarks announced that he intended to speak until 2.30 pm, thus "talking out" the bill. The Deputy Speaker declined to accept two attempts to claim the closure. The Minister was the only Member to speak against the bill: during the course of his remarks, he took several interventions from Members sharply critical of the tactics he was employing. Nick Thomas-Symonds MP, whose bill it was, recognised that the Government opposed the bill, but disagreed with the methods used to halt its progress: "However the Government wished to defeat the Bill, that was not a particularly elegant way to do it."<sup>20</sup>

25. We do not seek to deny the use of legitimate means to prevent bills from progressing. In some respects, dogged opposition to a bill by a minority of Members does many colleagues a service: without such tactics it would be far more likely that Government and Opposition business managers would seek to whip Friday votes, with evident consequences for the attendance of many Members on a Friday.

26. Nevertheless, such tactics cause confusion and frustration to members of the public observing such debates and expecting reasoned discussion on matters important to them. They also have an unfortunate effect on the quality of debate. St John Ambulance noted that in the debate on the Compulsory Emergency First Aid Education (State-funded Secondary Schools) Bill on 20 November 2015 "those in favour of the Bill made short speeches that supported its principles: those against sought to eat up time by making objections which [...] were not consistent". St John Ambulance observed that members in support of the Bill did not generally seek to counter the arguments made against it, since they feared that the debate would run out of time.<sup>21</sup> Similar points were made by Carers UK in respect of the debate on the Hospital Parking Charges (Exemption for Carers) Bill.<sup>22</sup>

27. We received conflicting evidence on the merits of obstructing bills by talking at a length which would not be tolerated by the House in any other kind of debate. Philip Davies MP, an acknowledged practitioner, mounted a robust defence of the practice.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, the Shadow Leader of the House, Chris Bryant MP, regretted a previous

<sup>19</sup> [E-petition 111441](#) is expected to be closed on 5 May 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Q45 [Nick Thomas-Symonds]

<sup>21</sup> St John Ambulance [[PMB 13](#)], para 6

<sup>22</sup> Carers UK [[PMB 16](#)] para 12

<sup>23</sup> Q66 and subsequent exchanges

indulgence.<sup>24</sup> Jacob Rees-Mogg MP also acknowledged that the practice, while potentially a stimulating challenge for the Member concerned, could give an unfortunate impression of the House:

I think there is a problem, and I am certainly guilty of this—as are one or two distinguished members of the Committee—of talking at length on Bills, and I have done it at the request of the Whips. I rather enjoy doing it—I should not pretend otherwise—but it doesn't make Parliament look great. I think that is a problem, which it is in everybody's interest to solve.<sup>25</sup>

We agree.

28. Although we have received a number of representations urging the introduction of measures to curb 'talking out', we do not, in this report, offer any recommendations to address the practice.<sup>26</sup> To introduce further means of curtailing debate which has been artificially prolonged could, in our view, merely lead to further ruses to obstruct the passage of bills. The more rules there are, the greater the opportunities to game them. The Speaker and his deputies already have power to bring to order Members who are indulging in irrelevance or tedious repetition in debate, and those powers have recently been used on a Friday.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the procedure for a Member who wants to bring a debate to an end by claiming the closure is well established and well understood, although the supermajority requirement of Standing Order No. 37—requiring 100 Members to vote for a closure of debate—is a formidable hurdle.

29. We repeat that we are not wedded to the idea that more legislation is an uncontested good. As Mark D'Arcy put it, "We are talking about making a set of rules that everyone has to obey here; it should not be an easy thing to do."<sup>28</sup> Our recommendations below seek to improve the accountability of Ministers and backbenchers for their positions on the merits of non-government bills, and to improve the quality of the legislative proposals which come before the House.

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24 Q169

25 Q100 [Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg]

26 Mr John Cresswell-Plant [[PMB 14](#)] para 2, Julie Cooper MP [[PMB 09](#)], Robert Parker MNI [[PMB 08](#)], Will Freake [[PMB 05](#)], Caroline Lucas MP [[PMB 18](#)] and a very large proportion of the 18,851 respondents to a survey undertaken by 38 Degrees [[PMB 19](#)].

27 HC Deb, 28 November 2014, [cols 1251](#), [1252](#) and [1253-54](#)

28 Q5 [Mark D'Arcy]

## 4 Recommendations for reform

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### A guaranteed vote on second reading

30. As we have already discussed, many bills fail to receive a second reading not because the House has decided that the bill should not progress, but because a Member—often a Minister—has talked up to the time at which, under the House's standing orders, substantive proceedings must lapse—thus “talking the bill out”.

31. On days when Government business has precedence—that is, on any sitting day other than a Friday—the likelihood that the Government will use its majority to force a closure and to secure its legislative business implicitly governs proceedings on second reading debates on Government bills. The assumption that a Minister will speak last in a debate, and conclude it immediately before the time when such proceedings would otherwise lapse, is sufficient to enable the Chair to impose time limits on speeches under Standing Order No. 47 to allow all Members wishing to speak to make a contribution.

32. Although the House is now well accustomed to the imposition of time limits on backbench speeches, and seems generally to accept them, even when imposed on backbench business, the Speaker and his deputies have been reluctant to extend the practice, when not authorised by the House to do so, to backbench legislative business.<sup>29</sup> As the Clerk of the House pointed out, “the Chair has to be confident that imposition of a time limit on speeches does not introduce an artificial end to a debate where no such end is provided for by the House's rules or by long-standing convention, as in the case of debate on Second Readings of Government Bills.”<sup>30</sup>

33. Our predecessors recommended that the House “should agree that there should be a convention that the question on second reading of a private Member's bill should be put to the House at the end of a full day's debate, in the same way that the House expects the question to be put on second reading of a Government bill.”<sup>31</sup> That Committee argued that this convention should operate only in respect of the first bill on the Order Paper on a PMB Friday, and only on those first seven Fridays on which second readings have precedence.

34. We discussed this proposal with the Clerk of the House. He offered two ways that a guaranteed vote on second reading could be achieved for PMBs:

- a) by convention (as the Committee previously recommended)—“the Speaker is fortified in then being able to ensure, by organisation of debate, together with the other managers in the House, that it does in fact come to an orderly end at around 2.28 pm and the Question can be put.”<sup>32</sup>

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29 For example, the Deputy Speaker declined to impose time limits on speeches on Second Reading of the Assisted Dying (No. 2) Bill, despite the fact that the debate was clearly oversubscribed: HC Deb, 11 September 2015, [col. 656](#).

30 Clerk of the House of Commons [[PMB 15](#)] para 4

31 Procedure Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2013–14, [Private Members' bills: Government response and revised proposals](#), HC 1171, para 6

32 Q125 [Clerk of the House]

- b) by introducing a standing order to provide that, at 2.30 pm on any given Friday, the Question is put to dispose of the first order of the day, provided that that order is for the second reading of a bill and that it has not otherwise been disposed of.<sup>33</sup>

35. The Clerk of the House indicated that, in his view, the prospect of a guaranteed vote at 2.30 pm at the latest would, if necessary, provide sufficient authority for the Speaker to impose maximum speaking times under Standing Order No. 47 without “being seen to force the pace [...] or to bring something to what might otherwise be an unnatural conclusion”.<sup>34</sup>

***36. We recommend that Standing Orders should be amended to provide that the Question on second reading of a bill which is the first order of the day on the first seven sitting Fridays in a session should be put from the Chair at the moment of interruption, if that business has not already been disposed of.***

37. In our view this is a reasonable step to ensure that the House has the chance to decide on whether bills which are the first order of business on the first seven sitting Fridays should progress to examination in committee.

38. We have been urged to introduce further measures to prohibit or restrict certain behaviour in the Chamber. As we have argued above, measures to prevent ‘talking a bill out’ would be ineffective and doubtless subject to further gaming. Furthermore, such measures would not address a genuine difficulty—namely that attendance in the House on Fridays is habitually low, save for certain debates, because fewer and fewer of our colleagues are convinced that the process is effective or worthwhile. We make recommendations to address this issue below.

### Prioritising certain bills on merit

39. One criticism of the ballot system is the way in which it encourages legislation to be considered for introduction only after a Member has secured a ballot slot for the introduction of a bill. This system tends to discourage the measured preparation of legislation for introduction: instead, it seems to precipitate a rush by Government and outside interests alike to lobby the successful Members to take up pre-prepared legislation or to consider incipient legislative notions which may not have been fully drafted.

40. Dignity in Dying observed that while “it is undeniably a strength of the system that an MP can consult on what bill to introduce before doing so”, there was no mechanism to ensure that well-supported and popular bills were debated: “what few opportunities are available are further limited if MPs choose to take Government ‘handout’ bills, undermining the idea that they are bills for the use of backbenchers”. They added:

The lack of certainty in the ballot also leads to bills being introduced at relatively short notice, allowing less time to consult on and scrutinise legislation before it is debated.<sup>35</sup>

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33 See Clerk of the House of Commons memorandum [\[PMB 15\]](#) para 7 for a more detailed explanation.

34 Q125 [Clerk of the House]

35 Dignity in Dying [\[PMB 12\]](#)

41. **We consider that the time has come for the ballot system to be supplemented with a scheme which encourages better preparation of legislation, on the basis of a sound case which can command widespread support across the House. Under our scheme, the Backbench Business Committee would have the responsibility to consider bids from backbenchers for bills to have their second readings debated in no more than the first four backbench legislative opportunities in each session.**

42. The scheme would require the Backbench Business Committee, at the start of each session, to consider bids for these legislative slots on the basis of published criteria. We outline below some of the criteria the committee might consider adopting. Members would submit, at the very least, the short and long titles of one bill to the Committee, together with statements of support from Members and, where available, evidence of any previous scrutiny undertaken on the legislative proposal.

43. The Committee would be entitled to nominate up to four such bills to be debated on second reading on up to the first four PMB Fridays. Following the Backbench Business Committee's nomination, a ballot would be held as before for the remaining bill slots: sponsors of the ballot bills would choose the days for second reading of their bills in order of success in the ballot, as before.

44. We discuss below the need to reduce the overall number of priority opportunities for backbench bills to be debated: we consider that the overall number should be reduced from the current 20 to 14 (comprising up to four bills chosen by the Backbench Business Committee, with the remainder being brought forward by members successful in the ballot).

45. Criteria which the Backbench Business Committee might wish to adopt in determining the merits of a bill include the following:

- The substance of the proposal and the number of Members prepared in principle to support it in debate;
- The nature of cross-party support for a bill, as demonstrated by signed statements of support submitted to the Committee, or early day motions: bills where support from within both government and opposition parties, and, potentially, from both front benches, could be demonstrated would have a better chance of progressing;
- Any previous scrutiny history to the bill: for example, a proposal which had previously been published and had been amended in the light of scrutiny might be a better candidate to submit to the House;
- Popular demand for consideration of a legislative proposal, possibly as expressed through petitioning.

Members successful at the Backbench Business Committee would not then be eligible to enter the PMB ballot that session: Members who were not successful would subsequently be allowed to enter the ballot, and would if successful not be obliged to present the bill previously proposed to the Backbench Business Committee.

46. This step would, we believe, mark an important step towards revival of interest across the House in PMBs. **We consider that a legislative proposition which has support on all sides of the House, backed by support from the public, will be more likely to result in engaged debates on sitting Fridays; and the criteria for the selection of such bills should be drafted to encourage Members to bring forward substantial and well thought-out measures for the House to decide upon. Realistically, the first opportunity for this system to be introduced is in the 2017–18 Session, but should the House approve the principle of the system early in the 2016–17 Session, then it would in practice allow parliamentarians, or groups of parliamentarians, to use the remainder of that session to lay the ground for well-founded legislative proposals to compete for the attention of the Backbench Business Committee at the beginning of the subsequent session.**

*47. We recommend that Standing Orders be amended, initially for the 2017–18 Session, to provide that the Backbench Business Committee shall determine up to four bills, to be set down as first order of business on the earliest sitting Fridays adopted by the House; and that a ballot then be held to determine Members to bring forward additional private Members' bills, up to the total number of such bills to be allocated priority in each session.*

### **Consequences for the Backbench Business Committee**

48. The Chair of the Backbench Business Committee is presently elected by the House at the beginning of each Session.<sup>36</sup> In order for the scheme outlined above to work as smoothly as possible with the existing ballot system, the time taken to elect the Committee Chair at the start of the session will have to be drastically reduced. Should the House adopt our proposal, the Backbench Business Committee in the next session of Parliament will be engaged in determining the criteria to be adopted for consideration of bills in the 2017–18 Session. We consider that, having drawn up the criteria, all members of that Committee should have the opportunity to operate the system which they have envisaged and devised.

*49. We recommend that, in the event that the House adopts the proposal on the role of the Backbench Business Committee outlined above, the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee elected for the 2016–17 Session should continue to serve on that Committee for the 2017–18 Session, and that the relevant Standing Order be suspended accordingly.*

### **The ballot**

50. We have already expressed concern at the number of bills which appear on the Order Paper which have little or no chance of progressing. While some of these bills, brought in following a short statement under the ten minute rule, or presented under Standing Order No. 57, may progress, if genuinely uncontroversial, the purpose of many such bills is largely declaratory and political and few can expect to receive any debate, let alone progress to committee. The Leader of the House considered many of them to be “engendered as part of external campaigns rather than as serious bids for legislation”.<sup>37</sup>

51. While bills drawn in the ballot are generally seen to have the best chance of progressing, the limited number of days available for debating PMBs means that those

<sup>36</sup> [Standing Order No. 152J\(3\)](#)

<sup>37</sup> Q186 [Leader of the House]

which are drawn later in the ballot have little more chance of becoming law than those which are introduced by other means. At present, 20 Members, their names drawn in the ballot, are entitled to introduce bills and given priority in naming the days on which they wish to have them debated. The Clerk of the House told us that the limit of 20 names “has never been a Standing Order limit and is to some extent arbitrary [...] there is no documented rationale for why this particular number was selected.”<sup>38</sup>

52. Of the 20 Members whose names are presently drawn in the ballot, the first seven have the best chance of their bill progressing. The following seven have longer odds—but, provided that they are not themselves controversial, still have a chance if they choose a Friday where the first bill is similarly uncontroversial. They may even progress on one of the six later Fridays, even though second readings do not take precedence on those days. The last six may choose to debate their proposal on one of those later Fridays, or they may choose to have their bill listed lower down on the Order Paper on one of the first seven PMB Fridays. In either case there is very little chance their bill would be given a second reading, except if it were remarkably uncontroversial in its scope and intent. Even if such a bill did receive a second reading on one of the last six Fridays, it is unlikely that, without tacit Government support, it would have enough time to go through a Public Bill Committee and then Report stage and third reading on the floor before the end of the session—not to mention completing its subsequent stages in the House of Lords.

53. We consider that in the present climate the number of Members chosen by ballot to introduce PMBs is too high. Those drawn at low positions in the ballot face an unappealing and potentially fruitless session seeking to make progress with their bills, should they choose to spurn a Government handout. Reducing the number of bills drawn from the ballot or otherwise given priority would mean that the percentage, though not the quantum, of bills which had a chance of making progress would be greater, resulting, we believe, in greater transparency and understanding of the likely outcomes for ballot bills.

54. We therefore consider that the total number of bills selected for priority consideration should be reduced from 20 to 14. This would allow every Member successful in the ballot to have, at worst, one of the second slots on one of the first seven Fridays. However it would not stop a Member from choosing to gamble on one of the last six days if they wished: a Member would still have the option to put their bill down for one of the final six days if this appeared preferable to following a bill likely to be debated for a full day. Presentation Bills and ten minute rule Bills would still take their place further down the queue for legislative time.

**55. We recommend that Standing Orders should be amended to provide for a maximum number of priority legislative opportunities allocated to Members on sitting Fridays. We further recommend that the total number of bills selected for priority consideration be reduced from 20 to 14. Of those 14 slots, up to four are to be filled by bills to be chosen on their merits by the Backbench Business Committee, and such bills shall have priority over ballot bills.**

## Demonstrating support for a bill

56. Currently the only way to demonstrate support for a private Member's bill on the day of debate is to turn up in the Chamber to speak in support. There is a perverse incentive, however, in that Members supporting a bill which is opposed may decide not to make a speech, or make only very short speeches, in order not to hamper the bill's chances of progressing.

57. Our view is that the breadth of support for a proposal should be considered an important test of that proposal's merits; an alternative system should therefore be introduced which would encourage Members to seek a broad consensus when preparing their bills, and enable them to make clear the extent of cross-party support for their bill if they so wished. Under this proposal, in addition to the names of up to twelve sponsors appearing on the face of a bill, a Member should be able to submit the names of additional Members supporting the bill, and the names of these supporters should be published on the effective Orders on the day on which the Bill is set down as an order of the day.

***58. We recommend the introduction of a system by which Members in charge of ballot bills and bills chosen by the Backbench Business Committee may, if they wish, demonstrate cross-party support for their bill by having the names of additional supporters published on the Order Paper on the day that the Bill's second reading is set down as an order of the day. This would require no change in Standing Orders.***

59. Such a system could allow Members to demonstrate the support that their bill had received. While this would have no procedural effect, it may make the political cost of ending the bill's progress more apparent to those who oppose it, particularly if the Member in charge had sought support from former Ministers, senior backbenchers or colleagues who are acknowledged policy experts. This system, coupled with our recommendation for a guaranteed vote on second reading for the first bill on the Order Paper, may result in more Members being willing to spend a Friday in the House for a bill that they particularly support.

## Clarifying the status of bills

60. Our predecessors made a number of proposals for administrative changes to the handling of bills on the Order Paper and for other subsidiary procedural changes, many of which received the general support of the Government but which were not put to the House for endorsement.<sup>39</sup> The Clerk of the House confirmed to us that all these recommendations were still capable of implementation as envisaged.<sup>40</sup>

61. In particular, recommendations that bills which had not been published should be clearly identified in the Future Business section of the Order Paper, and that a bill should not be brought in immediately after leave is granted under the ten minute rule, would assist in making the PMB process more transparent. Bills which had been drafted in full would, under these proposals, be more readily distinguishable from bills which comprised nothing more than a long title.

39 Procedure Committee, Second Report of Session 2013–14, [Private Members' bills](#), HC 188, recommendations 7 to 11 (Order Paper) and 12 to 19, and Fifth Report of Session 2013–14, [Private Members' bills: Government response and revised proposals](#), HC 1171.

40 Clerk of the House of Commons [\[PMB 15\]](#) para 2

62. *We endorse the recommendations of our predecessors set out below:*
- a) *We recommend that Future Business list private Members' bills only when they have been set down for a day on which private Member's bills have precedence.*<sup>41</sup>
  - b) *We consider that what appears on the Order Paper should be only actual bills which a private Member desires that the House should debate.*<sup>42</sup>
  - c) *We recommend that the expectation be removed that a bill will be immediately brought in if leave is granted after a motion is passed under the ten minute rule.*<sup>43</sup>
  - d) *We recommend that the possibility of a monopoly of the limited opportunities for debate of private Members' bills by a single Member be reduced by amending Standing Orders to permit that a private Member may present only a single bill on any one day.*<sup>44</sup>
  - e) *We recommend that the deadline for printing a bill—that is, producing a fully drafted piece of legislation, in place of a “long title”—be brought forward to the Wednesday of the week prior to the day of second reading.*<sup>45</sup>
  - f) *We recommend that the Government engage constructively and at the earliest opportunity in discussions on money resolutions with Members actively seeking to get bills through the House, and demonstrate accountability for its undertaking to table such resolutions by responding fully to Parliamentary questions on such matters.*<sup>46</sup>
  - g) *We recommend that the Government give a clear commitment that, where requested by a bill's sponsor, it will normally expect to table a motion to allow a public bill committee on a private Member's bill to be nominated while public bill committee proceedings on another private Member's bill are still active.*<sup>47</sup>
  - h) *We recommend that, in the Standing Orders and elsewhere where reference is made to them, the term “private Members' bills” be replaced with “backbench bills”.*<sup>48</sup>
63. *In addition, we recommend that the following changes to the practice of the House on giving notice of bills should be made:*
- a) *Following the last sitting Friday of each session, Future Business should no longer carry notices concerning any private Member's bill, and a list of bills not disposed of should be separately published on the Bills before Parliament website.*

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41 [HC \(2013–14\) 188](#), para 70 (recommendation 11)

42 [HC \(2013–14\) 188](#), para 66 (recommendation 7)

43 [HC \(2013–14\) 188](#), para 72 (recommendation 12)

44 [HC \(2013–14\) 188](#), para 76 (recommendation 13). A draft Standing Order change to achieve this recommendation is available at [HC \(2013–14\) 1171](#), para 18.

45 [HC \(2013–14\) 188](#), para 78 (recommendation 15). A draft Standing Order change to achieve this recommendation is available at [HC \(2013–14\) 1171](#), para 20.

46 [HC \(2013–14\) 1171](#), para 28

47 [HC \(2013–14\) 1171](#), para 29 (recommendation 18)

48 [HC \(2013–14\) 188](#), para 85 (recommendation 19). Draft Standing Order changes to achieve this recommendation are available at [HC \(2013–14\) 1171](#), para 22.

- b) *After the last sitting Friday of a session, any ten minute rule bill introduced should be ordered to lie upon the Table, and should not be printed.*
- c) *All unprinted private Members' bills should be clearly indicated as such on Future Business and on the Bills before Parliament website.*

64. In the longer term, we consider that the House should reassess its tolerance for Members introducing bills in dummy form—that is, presenting bills with a short and long title and list of supporters only. With the exception of the Finance Bill—the drafting of which is dictated by the timetable for preparation of the Budget—the presentation of legislation in dummy is a practice long denied to the Government in respect of primary and secondary legislation.

### A decision by the House on the Committee's proposals

65. *In cases where the outcomes recommended above may be achieved by administrative action alone, we recommend that the necessary measures be taken with effect from the start of the 2016–17 Session. In all other cases we recommend that the House be given an early opportunity to express its view on the proposed changes.*

66. The House may, of course, decide that it prefers to make no change to the existing procedures, and vote against all the proposals we have put forward.

### Time for consideration of private Members' bills

67. We have, in this report, considered the process of backbench legislation separately from the place of such legislation in the parliamentary calendar, though it is undeniable that the two issues are linked: if backbench legislation were taken on days when more members were present at Westminster, the calculations of business managers about the whipping of such business would undoubtedly change, and attendance at debates—and the likelihood of clear decisions on bills—might increase.

68. The present largely moribund nature of many parliamentary Fridays is an inevitable consequence of the increased gaming of procedures. Poor attendance in support of bills—in numbers insufficient to secure the supermajority for a closure—hand the initiative to a bill's opponents, be they on the Treasury Bench or the backbenches. The reforms which we recommend piloting have the merit of prioritising popular and engaging measures to be debated on Fridays, to be chosen by the Backbench Business Committee on their merits and the strength of cross-party support across the House. Although we envisage that the model should be tried first on Fridays, it is a model which is transferable to other days of the week. We do not, for example, rule out the possibility of further amendments to Standing Orders to enable the Backbench Business Committee to schedule debates on legislation on Thursdays.

69. We note that the options of scheduling such debates on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, after Government business has been disposed of, commands some support among colleagues. Caroline Lucas MP recommended that sitting hours be changed and PMBs moved to “a midweek slot where more members can attend.”<sup>49</sup> Professor Sarah Childs, of the University of Bristol, who has been researching reforms to make the House a

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49 Caroline Lucas MP [[PMB 18](#)]

more inclusive institution, rejected any attempt to move PMBs to evening sittings. Instead, she recommended a reconfiguration of the Parliamentary calendar whereby more time on Thursdays—now largely a backbench day—might be made for consideration of PMBs, with Fridays given over entirely to constituency activity.<sup>50</sup>

**70. We make no recommendation here about alternative times for PMBs to be taken. Instead, we plan to address the sitting hours of the House in a separate exercise, taking the views of Members on existing sitting patterns and, like our predecessor Committee in 2012, proposing a series of neutral motions which will allow the House to come to a decision on its sitting patterns for the remainder of the Parliament.**

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50 Professor Sarah Childs [[PMB 10](#)]

# Conclusions and recommendations

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## Our predecessors' inquiry and reports

1. We endorse the general principles which underlie our predecessor Committee's two reports on private Members' bills. We too find it regrettable that successive administrations have not responded effectively to concerns about the process, even when workable solutions have been proposed. The proposals in this report provide an opportunity for a new beginning to the PMBs process which, as it presently operates, brings increasing discredit on the House because of the way it is now largely reduced to an exercise in futility. (Paragraph 9)

## A guaranteed vote on second reading

2. We recommend that Standing Orders should be amended to provide that the Question on second reading of a bill which is the first order of the day on the first seven sitting Fridays in a session should be put from the Chair at the moment of interruption, if that business has not already been disposed of. (Paragraph 36)

## Prioritising certain bills on merit

3. We consider that the time has come for the ballot system to be supplemented with a scheme which encourages better preparation of legislation, on the basis of a sound case which can command widespread support across the House. Under our scheme, the Backbench Business Committee would have the responsibility to consider bids from backbenchers for bills to have their second readings debated in no more than the first four backbench legislative opportunities in each session. (Paragraph 41)
4. We consider that a legislative proposition which has support on all sides of the House, backed by support from the public, will be more likely to result in engaged debates on sitting Fridays; and the criteria for the selection of such bills should be drafted to encourage Members to bring forward substantial and well thought-out measures for the House to decide upon. Realistically, the first opportunity for this system to be introduced is in the 2017–18 Session, but should the House approve the principle of the system early in the 2016–17 Session, then it would in practice allow parliamentarians, or groups of parliamentarians, to use the remainder of that session to lay the ground for well-founded legislative proposals to compete for the attention of the Backbench Business Committee at the beginning of the subsequent session. (Paragraph 46)
5. We recommend that Standing Orders be amended, initially for the 2017–18 Session, to provide that the Backbench Business Committee shall determine up to four bills, to be set down as first order of business on the earliest sitting Fridays adopted by the House; and that a ballot then be held to determine Members to bring forward additional private Members' bills, up to the total number of such bills to be allocated priority in each session. (Paragraph 47)

### Consequences for the Backbench Business Committee

6. We recommend that, in the event that the House adopts the proposal on the role of the Backbench Business Committee outlined above, the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee elected for the 2016–17 Session should continue to serve on that Committee for the 2017–18 Session, and that the relevant Standing Order be suspended accordingly. (Paragraph 49)
7. We recommend that Standing Orders should be amended to provide for a maximum number of priority legislative opportunities allocated to Members on sitting Fridays. We further recommend that the total number of bills selected for priority consideration be reduced from 20 to 14. Of those 14 slots, up to four are to be filled by bills to be chosen on their merits by the Backbench Business Committee, and such bills shall have priority over ballot bills. (Paragraph 55)

### Demonstrating support for a bill

8. We recommend the introduction of a system by which Members in charge of ballot bills and bills chosen by the Backbench Business Committee may, if they wish, demonstrate cross-party support for their bill by having the names of additional supporters published on the Order Paper on the day that the Bill's second reading is set down as an order of the day. This would require no change in Standing Orders. (Paragraph 58)

### Clarifying the status of bills

9. We endorse the recommendations of our predecessors set out below:
  - a) We recommend that Future Business list private Members' bills only when they have been set down for a day on which private Member's bills have precedence.
  - b) We consider that what appears on the Order Paper should be only actual bills which a private Member desires that the House should debate.
  - c) We recommend that the expectation be removed that a bill will be immediately brought in if leave is granted after a motion is passed under the ten minute rule.
  - d) We recommend that the possibility of a monopoly of the limited opportunities for debate of private Members' bills by a single Member be reduced by amending Standing Orders to permit that a private Member may present only a single bill on any one day.
  - e) We recommend that the deadline for printing a bill—that is, producing a fully drafted piece of legislation, in place of a “long title”—be brought forward to the Wednesday of the week prior to the day of second reading.
  - f) We recommend that the Government engage constructively and at the earliest opportunity in discussions on money resolutions with Members actively seeking to get bills through the House, and demonstrate accountability for its undertaking to table such resolutions by responding fully to Parliamentary questions on such matters.

- g) We recommend that the Government give a clear commitment that, where requested by a bill's sponsor, it will normally expect to table a motion to allow a public bill committee on a private Member's bill to be nominated while public bill committee proceedings on another private Member's bill are still active.
  - h) We recommend that, in the Standing Orders and elsewhere where reference is made to them, the term "private Members' bills" be replaced with "backbench bills". (Paragraph 62)
10. In addition, we recommend that the following changes to the practice of the House on giving notice of bills should be made:
- a) Following the last sitting Friday of each session, Future Business should no longer carry notices concerning any private Member's bill, and a list of bills not disposed of should be separately published on the Bills before Parliament website.
  - b) After the last sitting Friday of a session, any ten minute rule bill introduced should be ordered to lie upon the Table, and should not be printed.
  - c) All unprinted private Members' bills should be clearly indicated as such on Future Business and on the Bills before Parliament website. (Paragraph 63)
11. In the longer term, we consider that the House should reassess its tolerance for Members introducing bills in dummy form—that is, presenting bills with a short and long title and list of supporters only. With the exception of the Finance Bill—the drafting of which is dictated by the timetable for preparation of the Budget—the presentation of legislation in dummy is a practice long denied to the Government in respect of primary and secondary legislation. (Paragraph 64)

### A decision by the House on the Committee's proposals

12. In cases where the outcomes recommended above may be achieved by administrative action alone, we recommend that the necessary measures be taken with effect from the start of the 2016–17 Session. In all other cases we recommend that the House be given an early opportunity to express its view on the proposed changes. (Paragraph 65)

### Time for consideration of private Members' bills

13. We make no recommendation here about alternative times for PMBs to be taken. Instead, we plan to address the sitting hours of the House in a separate exercise, taking the views of Members on existing sitting patterns and, like our predecessor Committee in 2012, proposing a series of neutral motions which will allow the House to come to a decision on its sitting patterns for the remainder of the Parliament. (Paragraph 70)

## Formal Minutes

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**Wednesday 13 April 2016**

Mr Charles Walker, in the Chair

Edward Argar	Sir Edward Leigh
Bob Blackman	Holly Lynch
Nic Dakin	Mr Alan Mak
Patricia Gibson	Mr David Nuttall
Patrick Grady	

Draft Report (*Private Members' bills*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 70 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

*Resolved*, That the Chair 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 Wednesday 20 April at 2.30 pm.]

# Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

## Wednesday 6 January 2016

*Question number*

**Mark D'Arcy**, Parliamentary Correspondent, BBC News, **Isabel Hardman**, Assistant Editor, The Spectator, and **Michael White**, Associate Editor, The Guardian

[Q1–28](#)

## Wednesday 20 January 2016

**Teresa Pearce MP**, Labour, Erith and Thamesmead, **Mike Wood MP**, Conservative, Dudley South, and **Nick Thomas-Symonds MP**, Labour, Torfaen

[Q29–64](#)

**Philip Davies MP**, Conservative, Shipley

[Q65–89](#)

## Wednesday 27 January 2016

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg MP**, Conservative, North East Somerset and **Thomas Docherty**

[Q90–122](#)

## Wednesday 24 February 2016

**David Natzler**, Clerk of the House of Commons, and **Fergus Reid**, Clerk of Private Members' Bills

[Q123–143](#)

**Dr Ruth Fox**, Director and Head of Research, Hansard Society

[Q144–163](#)

## Wednesday 2 March 2016

**Chris Bryant MP**, Shadow Leader of the House of Commons

[Q164–185](#)

**Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP**, Leader of the House of Commons

[Q186–203](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

PMB numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 38 Degrees ([PMB0019](#))
- 2 Carers UK ([PMB0016](#))
- 3 Caroline Lucas MP ([PMB0018](#))
- 4 Clerk of the House of Commons ([PMB0015](#))
- 5 Dignity in Dying ([PMB0012](#))
- 6 Huw Jones ([PMB0002](#))
- 7 John Cresswell-Plant ([PMB0014](#))
- 8 Julie Cooper MP ([PMB0009](#))
- 9 Mr David Morgan ([PMB0006](#))
- 10 Mr Derek Dod ([PMB0003](#))
- 11 Mr Philip Haggar ([PMB0001](#))
- 12 Mr Robert Parker MNI ([PMB0008](#))
- 13 Professor Sarah Childs ([PMB0010](#))
- 14 Scottish National Party (SNP) ([PMB0017](#))
- 15 St John Ambulance ([PMB0013](#))
- 16 William Freake ([PMB0005](#))

## Unpublished written evidence

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The following written evidence has been reported to the House and copies have been placed in the House of Commons Library, where they may be inspected by Members. Other copies are in the Parliamentary Archives ([www.parliament.uk/archives](http://www.parliament.uk/archives)), and are available to the public for inspection. Requests for inspection should be addressed to The Parliamentary Archives, Houses of Parliament, London SW1A 0PW (tel. 020 7219 3074; email [archives@parliament.uk](mailto:archives@parliament.uk)). Opening hours are from 9.30 am to 5.00 pm on Mondays to Fridays.

Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

### Session 2015–16

First Report	Government proposals for English votes for English laws Standing Orders: Interim Report	HC 410 (HCWS (2015–16) 251)
Second Report	Notification of the arrest of Members	HC 649