



HOUSE OF LORDS

Liaison Committee

1st Report of Session 2019–21

A Covid-19 Committee

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Liaison Committee

The Liaison Committee advises the House on the resources required for select committee work and allocates resources between select committees; reviews the select committee work of the House; considers requests for *ad hoc* committees and reports to the House with recommendations; ensures effective co-ordination between the two Houses; and considers the availability of Lords to serve on committees.

Membership

The Members of the Liaison Committee are:

[Lord Bradley](#)

[Lord Davies of Oldham](#)

[Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town](#)

[Earl Howe](#)

[Lord Judge](#)

[Lord Lang of Monkton](#)

[Lord Low of Dalston](#)

[Lord McFall of Alcluith](#) (Chair)

[Lord Smith of Hindhead](#)

[Lord Tyler](#)

[Baroness Walmsley](#)

Declaration of interests

See Appendix 1.

A full list of Members' interests can be found in the Register of Lords' Interests:

<http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/register-of-lords-interests>

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<http://www.parliament.uk/business/lords>

Committee staff

The staff who worked on this report were Philippa Tudor (Clerk), Lucy Molloy (Research Assistant) and Heather Fuller (Committee Assistant).

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A Covid-19 Committee

Background

1. In April the Liaison Committee was due to undertake its regular process of shortlisting and, ultimately, choosing four special inquiry topics for the forthcoming year. 24 proposals were submitted by members of the House, a number of which made reference to Covid-19. In late March and early April a number of members of the Liaison Committee suggested that the usual special inquiry process be ‘paused’, in order to allow a degree of re-focusing upon the present situation. It was suggested that there should be a re-orientation of our scrutiny work to take account of current circumstances.
2. Separately, a number of other members of the House suggested that some committee resource should be dedicated to scrutiny of the Government response to Covid-19, and to understanding the wider and longer-term impacts for the economy, society, technology and international relations. There appears to be a strong degree of support for the establishment of a committee with the ability to undertake a comprehensive examination of the long-term implications of Covid-19.
3. In response, this report proposes the establishment of a committee to scrutinise the long-term implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economic and social wellbeing of the United Kingdom. The Committee would be high profile, cross-cutting, and would draw on the wide-ranging expertise of members to explore these matters. Whilst, in accordance with standard practice, we leave it to the Committee itself to decide the details of its call for evidence, this report sets out the principal areas of focus for its work.
4. The Liaison Committee will reconvene in mid-June to consider special inquiry proposals that were submitted before the 31 March deadline, as well as any other matters pertaining to the committee work of the House.

Scrutiny of the COVID-19 pandemic

5. Several House of Lords committees, including the Science and Technology Committee, plan inquiries into related subjects or are incorporating Covid-19 considerations into their ongoing inquiries. The Joint Committee on Human Rights has also embarked upon an inquiry into the human rights implications of the recent response measures undertaken by the Government. This excellent, detailed scrutiny will of course continue across all relevant committees. The recently established Committee Chairs’ Forum, introduced following the Liaison Committee review of committee activity, will provide a means of ensuring knowledge exchange across House of Lords investigative and scrutiny committees, including in relation to Covid-19 scrutiny work.
6. The Liaison Committee review¹, endorsed by the House, agreed last year the key role of House of Lords committees. Reflecting that role in this context would see the speedy establishment of a cross-cutting Covid-19 committee, focussed on the wider, longer-term implications for the economic and social wellbeing of the United Kingdom. Covid-19 is the most important public health

1 Liaison Committee, *Review of House of Lords Investigative and Scrutiny Committees: towards a new thematic committee structure* (6th Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 398)

challenge the country has experienced in a century, and much Parliamentary scrutiny to date has quite rightly focused upon the governmental, medical and logistical response to the crisis the virus has caused. The effects of the pandemic range much wider than public health, however, with implications for almost every aspect of our economy, society, and cultural life. It is important that the House establishes a dedicated resource for managing committee scrutiny and understanding of the long-term implications of this unprecedented challenge.

7. Several House of Commons departmental select committees, including the Health and Social Care Committee, are already conducting investigations focused upon the current policy response of the Government. The aim of the cross-cutting House of Lords Committee would be to make a distinct contribution focused not upon the ‘here and now’ but, instead, intended to develop an understanding of the lessons learned and longer-term implications for the UK economy and society. This will include implications for broad societal wellbeing, the economy, industrial strategy, and cultural and voluntary activity. In addition, the role of the UK within international organisations, and environmental and technological developments arising from our response to the pandemic should also merit consideration
8. The extensive expertise available in our House, combined with the well-deserved reputation of our select committees for focusing on ‘the long-term’, would ensure a distinct focus for the committee. The remit would allow for focus upon the economic, societal, technological and international implications and effects of the virus. This needs to be broad, to allow for the truly cross-cutting scrutiny in which House of Lords committees specialise. However, the remit, scope and timetable of the committee must also be manageable. We now, therefore, set out a number of measures to support delivery of the committee’s work.

Operation of the committee

9. The Liaison Committee will maintain oversight of the role and scope of the committee, and will formally review its activity and continuing remit before the end of 2020. To support this function the new Committee should have leave to report from time to time—in other words to issue more than one report—rather than one final reporting deadline.
10. The Chairs’ Forum will provide a means for integrating the work of the new committee with that of existing sessional committees which are undertaking work of wider relevance on Covid-19. The Chairs’ Forum meets regularly, and provides an ideal platform for knowledge exchange and shared understanding across committee activity as a whole. This should be further supported by dialogue between relevant sessional committee chairs, the chair of the new committee, and the Senior Deputy Speaker.

Recommendation

11. **The Committee recommends the establishment of a House of Lords Covid-19 Committee, to consider the long-term implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economic and broad societal wellbeing of the United Kingdom, and to start its work as soon as possible.**
12. **The new committee will be required to undertake a cross-cutting approach to its inquiry, and its principal areas of focus will be**

defined by a call for evidence in the usual way. We envisage that key areas of focus for the committee will include implications for societal wellbeing, the economy and industrial strategy, cultural and voluntary activity, the role of the UK within international organisations, and environmental and technological developments arising from our response to the pandemic.

13. **The Liaison Committee will conduct a review of the new committee's role before the end of 2020, to assess its continuing remit and efficacy in the circumstances in which we then find ourselves.**
14. The Liaison Committee intends to reconvene in mid-June to consider the special inquiry proposals previously received.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF MEMBERS AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members

Lord Bradley
Lord Davies of Oldham
Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town
Earl Howe
Lord Lang of Monkton
Lord Low of Dalston
Lord Judge
Lord McFall of Alcluith (Chair)
Lord Smith of Hindhead
Lord Tyler
Baroness Walmsley

Declaration of interest

Lord Bradley
No interests declared

Lord Davies of Oldham
No interests declared

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town
No interests declared

Earl Howe
No relevant interests to declare

Lord Lang of Monkton
No interests declared

Lord Low of Dalston
No relevant interests to declare

Lord Judge
No interests declared

Lord McFall of Alcluith
Member, Advisory Board, Systemic Risk Company (non-financial interest)

Lord Smith of Hindhead
No interests declared

Lord Tyler
No relevant interests to declare

Baroness Walmsley
No relevant interests to declare