



BRIEFING PAPER

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Proxy voting in divisions in the House

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Summary

Proxy voting pilot scheme

On 28 January 2019, the House [agreed](#) to implement a one-year pilot scheme to allow new parents and those adopting children to have a proxy vote in divisions in the House. Additionally, as a result of an amendment, the Speaker may “also make provision for the exercise of a proxy vote for Members who have suffered a miscarriage”. The [pilot scheme](#) came into effect on 29 January 2019, and the first proxy vote was cast later that day.

On 16 January 2020, the House [extended the pilot scheme by six months](#) (to 28 July 2020).

Early in June 2020, the scope of the pilot scheme was [extended](#) to allow Members “unable to attend at Westminster for medical or public health reasons related to the [coronavirus] pandemic” to vote by proxy.

On 20 July 2020, the duration of the pilot scheme was [extended to 20 months](#).

Before the debate, on 28 January 2019, the pilot scheme was made available (excluding miscarriage, as in the original motions before the amendment was agreed). The Speaker [confirmed](#) that if the provisions relating to miscarriage were adopted, they would be incorporated as soon as possible but would not delay the implementation of the scheme that had already been made available.

After the House’s decision, the Speaker [certified](#) the first proxy vote for Tulip Siddiq.

The [temporary Standing Order](#) reflects proposals made by the Procedure Committee in May 2018. It confirms that proxy voting will be available in all public and private business of the House, except votes on a motion for an early parliamentary general election under the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*, neither will proxy votes be accepted in counting the quorum of the House or towards the numbers in favour of a closure motion.

Review of the Scheme

The Procedure Committee was directed to review the pilot arrangements within 12 months of the scheme coming into effect.

The decisions on 16 January and 20 July 2020, to extend the pilot scheme, also extended the time the Procedure Committee has to conduct its review.

In the 2017 Parliament, the Committee [began a review](#) but had not completed it at dissolution.

On 4 March 2020, at its first meeting in the 2019 Parliament, the new Procedure Committee [revived the review](#).

The Procedure Committee’s [review of the pilot arrangements](#) was published on 10 September 2020. The Committee considered both the arrangements for parental leave and those relating to the pandemic.

Recommendations of the review

The Procedure Committee recommended that the proxy voting for parental absence scheme should be made permanent, with some technical modifications (allowing proxy votes to be counted in motions under the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* and for the election of all committee chairs). It found that experience of the scheme had been “broadly positive”; no issues of principle or major flaws were identified; and that its use was accepted across the House. It also observed that “The use of proxy voting as a

means of accommodating parental absence appears to us to have been more transparent than the use of pairing”.

The Committee recommended that it should no longer be a requirement to produce a certificate of pregnancy or a matching certificate to qualify for a proxy vote. But certification for eligibility could be undertaken by any of the Deputy Speakers as well as the Speaker.

The Committee committed to examining whether there should be other grounds for qualifying for a proxy vote once arrangements for proxy voting for public health reasons had ended.

It also recommended that eligibility for a proxy vote should begin four weeks before due date and end six months after the later of the due date or date of birth. Fathers or second adopters should be eligible for the two weeks of proxy voting in the first six months.

On the arrangements for proxy voting due to the pandemic, the Committee called for arrangements for self-certifying for proxy voting and participating in virtual proceedings to be aligned. It recommended that the arrangements should continue “for as long as public health guidance or statutory provisions in any part of the UK has the effect of restricting the ability of Members to travel to Westminster”.

The Committee expressed concern that the “present infrastructure supporting the pass-reader division system is barely adequate, especially in respect of proxy voting”. It called for an alternative to be found.

It considered that the remote voting system using which Members could participate remotely in both scrutiny and substantive business was more effective. It recommended that remote voting be reinstated.

Debates on proxy voting

On 13 September 2018, the House held a general debate on proxy voting. At the outset of the debate, Andrea Leadsom [said](#) that she “wanted the fullest opportunity to consider all the implications” before bringing forward a substantive motion. At the end of the debate, she [concluded](#) that she was “minded to accept the majority of the recommendations of the Procedure Committee’s report, which provides a good basis for a pilot scheme”. She confirmed that she intended “to bring forward a substantive motion as soon as possible”.

The general debate on the principle of proxy voting in divisions in the House of Commons had been scheduled to take place on 5 July 2018. However, the debate did not take place as statements had taken almost all the time allocated for the debate.

The debate was to have taken place before the Government responded to the Procedure Committee’s report on [Proxy voting and parental absence](#), which was published on 15 May 2018. Andrea Leadsom [said](#) that the debate would allow the constitutional issues of proxy voting to be discussed before she gave a considered response to the Procedure Committee.

The Procedure Committee’s inquiry followed a [debate](#) on baby leave on 1 February 2018, which supported calls for formalised arrangements for maternity, paternity and adoption leave for new parents in the House.

[The Good Parliament](#) (July 2016) previously had called for more formal arrangements. The [Speaker’s Conference \(on Parliamentary Representation\)](#) (January 2010) called on political parties to set out their policies on maternity, paternity and caring leave for Members; and

invited the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority to consider formal arrangements for maternity, paternity and caring leave for Members.

Procedure Committee proposals

The Procedure Committee brought forward proposals for a non-compulsory scheme for proxy voting that would require some changes to Standing Orders. It recommended that “proxy voting ought to be available to new mothers, new fathers and adoptive parents”. The scheme should operate under the authority of the Speaker, who would certify the appointment of a proxy.

It recommended that:

- Eligibility would be confirmed by producing either a certificate of pregnancy or a ‘matching certificate’ from a registered adoption agency to the Speaker.
- The dispensation to vote by proxy would be:
 - “Six months for the biological mother of a baby, or for the primary or single adopter of a baby or child;
 - “Two weeks for the biological father of a baby, the partner of the person giving birth or the second adopter of a baby or child”.

The Committee said that the new system would have to operate in a transparent way.

The Committee also considered whether a proxy should be exercised in all divisions or whether there should be restrictions. It proposed that subject to certain limitations a proxy could be exercised in almost all divisions and deferred divisions in the House, although it said that the House might impose further restrictions. It recommended that proxy votes should not be used in votes for an early general election under the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* or in determining whether fewer than 40 Members had participated in a division.

Andrea Leadsom’s response to the Procedure Committee

Andrea Leadsom [wrote](#) to Charles Walker, the Chair of the Procedure Committee, on 12 July 2018 (published 18 July). She thanked the Committee for its report and expressed her disappointment that the 5 July debate did not go ahead.

She stated that “The integrity of the voting system in the House of Commons must be above reproach”.

Andrea Leadsom noted that because it had been given the specific objective of devising a proxy voting system for parental leave, the Committee had not considered alternative approaches – such as formalised pairing. She also raised the question of extending proxy voting to those suffering long-term illness or bereavement. She queried whether any discretion in a proxy voting system would be appropriate.

She stressed the importance of considering these issues to ensure that the House was aware of “all the implications of any potential changes”.

Pairing

An alternative to proxy voting is to continue the practice of pairing – two Members from opposite sides agree to be absent at the same time so that the majority in a division is not affected – either as currently, on an informal basis (overseen by whips), or in a more formalised way.

Pairing was brought into the spotlight in the summer of 2018 when Brandon Lewis apologised to Jo Swinson for breaking their pair in a vote at Report Stage of the *Trade Bill 2017-19*, on 17 July 2018.

Ms Swinson had been paired, following the recent birth of her second son. She would have qualified for a proxy vote if the Procedure Committee's recommendations had been implemented.

Extending the proxy arrangements during the coronavirus pandemic

Arrangements were made for MPs to vote remotely during May. But from the beginning of June, the Government encouraged all Members to participate in proceedings in the House. Initially no provisions were made for MPs who were shielding, isolating or caring for someone else as a result of the coronavirus pandemic to participate in proceedings from 2 June. On 2 June 2020, the House [agreed](#) that Members had to be on the Parliamentary estate to participate in divisions.

Disquiet was expressed about these provisions and the Leader of the House said that he had not ruled out extending proxy voting to those who were shielding.

On 4 June 2020, the House [agreed](#) to a Government proposal that proxy voting should be available to Members who were "at high risk from coronavirus for reasons that they are either 'clinically extremely vulnerable' or 'clinically vulnerable'".

Members had expressed concern that this did not go far enough and an Emergency Debate, [granted](#) on 4 June, was [held](#) on 8 June 2020.

On 10 June, the House [altered the eligibility for proxy votes](#) to those Members who were "unable to attend at Westminster for medical or public health reasons related to the pandemic".

A total of 135 pandemic-related certificates were [reported](#) in the *Votes and Proceedings* on 11 June 2020.

On 16 June 2020, the Speaker made a [short statement](#) on the new division procedure and proxy voting on health grounds because of the pandemic. On proxy voting, he said:

I remind colleagues that the expanded proxy voting scheme applies to Members who are unable to attend Westminster for medical or public health reasons relating to the pandemic. If an hon. Member applies for a proxy vote, this means that they have given me and the House a commitment that they are not able to attend Westminster. It is therefore important that colleagues with proxies do not take part in any physical proceedings or come on to the Estate while they have a proxy vote in operation.

1. Pilot proxy voting scheme (Resolution of 28 January 2019)

On 28 January 2019, the House agreed to implement a one-year pilot scheme to allow new parents and those adopting children to have a proxy vote in divisions in the House. Additionally, as a result of an amendment, the Speaker may “also make provision for the exercise of a proxy vote for Members who have suffered a miscarriage”.¹ The pilot scheme came into effect on 29 January 2019,² and the first proxy vote was cast later that day (see Box 1).

On 16 January 2020, the House extended the pilot scheme by six months.³ Then on 20 July 2020, the duration of the pilot scheme was extended by a further two months to 20 months in total, ending on 28 September 2020.⁴

Box 1: Extract from the Division List – Division 307 2017-19, 29 January 2019

Division 307

[Siddiq, Tulip \(Proxy vote cast by Vicky Foxcroft\)](#)

The division on the amendment (a) to the motion that the House had considered two written statements made under the *European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018*.⁵

Before the debate, the pilot scheme was made available (excluding miscarriage, as in the original motions before the amendment was agreed). The Speaker confirmed that if the provisions relating to miscarriage were adopted, they would be incorporated as soon as possible but would not delay the implementation of the scheme that had already been made available:

I should make it clear that if amendment (d) is agreed to, I shall ensure that the additional requirement relating to miscarriage is incorporated into the pilot scheme and duly authorised as soon as possible. I must emphasise that this would not delay the immediate implementation of the scheme in the form that has been made available in the Vote Office. I call the Leader of the House to move motion 6.⁶

After the debate, he told the House that:

As has already been alluded to during the debate, the pilot scheme that I am directed to prepare has been signed by myself, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the parliamentary leader of the Scottish National party. The scheme, colleagues, will be published this evening and will therefore indeed have effect from tomorrow.

¹ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 cc596-614](#)

² House of Commons, [Scheme on proxy voting for use under para \(4\) of Resolution of 28 January 2019](#)

³ [HC Deb 16 January 2020 c1266](#)

⁴ [HC Deb 20 July 2020 c1964](#)

⁵ [HC Deb 29 January 2019 cc757-761](#)

⁶ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 c596](#)

I also confirm that I expect my first certificate of eligibility to be published in the Votes and Proceedings for today, enabling a proxy vote to be cast tomorrow.⁷

After the House's decision, the Speaker certified the first proxy vote for Tulip Siddiq.⁸ A list of certificates issued under the pilot scheme is given in the Appendix.

1.1 The debate

The House debated a motion that would provide for the provision of a pilot scheme to take effect from the beginning of the sitting day after it was signed by the Speaker and the leaders of the three largest parties in the House of Commons. The motion also provided that the pilot scheme should last for 12 months. A separate motion set out a temporary Standing Order, and the Speaker selected an amendment that would allow him to extend the Scheme to Members who have suffered a miscarriage.⁹

In opening the debate, Andrea Leadsom welcomed the work that the Procedure Committee had done on preparing a scheme for proxy voting. She also paid tribute to Members who campaigned for and supported the scheme. She said that she was sympathetic to the amendment but noted that "those suffering such distress may well prefer to do so in private". She was again asked about extending the scheme. (Other similar requests were made in the debate.¹⁰) Andrea Leadsom replied that towards the end of the pilot, "we can look again at whether the issue should be restricted to baby leave or expanded".¹¹

For the official Opposition, Valerie Vaz thanked the Leader of the House for bringing the motions forward. She reiterated the Labour Party's support for the principle of proxy voting. She outlined how the scheme would work.¹² The SNP too welcomed the motions.¹³

While she welcomed the introduction of proxy voting, Maria Miller described the steps being taken as a "piecemeal approach". She highlighted the need "to be better at shaping our vision for the future of what this place should be in totality".¹⁴

In contrast David Davis described himself as an "incremental reformer" but described proxy voting as "overdue". He expected further reform to the scheme.¹⁵

Philip Davies, who tabled the amendment, explained why he was sceptical about proxy voting – noting that Members should be able to be persuaded by debate. He considered how the scheme could be extended and noted some differences between the pilot scheme and

⁷ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 c614](#)

⁸ House of Commons, *Votes and Proceedings*, 28 January 2019

⁹ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 cc596-614](#)

¹⁰ For example, [HC Deb 28 January 2019 cc605-606](#); [c606](#)

¹¹ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 cc596-598](#)

¹² [HC Deb 28 January 2019 cc598-600](#)

¹³ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 c601](#)

¹⁴ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 c600](#)

¹⁵ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 cc608-609](#)

the Procedure Committee's proposals. He hoped that all these issues would feature in the Procedure Committee's review of the pilot.¹⁶

When Mark Harper highlighted the need for privacy in some cases of absence, which the pairing system provided, Rachel Reeves noted that proxy voting would be voluntary and pairing could continue.¹⁷

The motion to approve the introduction of the scheme, the amendment to the proposed Temporary Standing Order and the amended Temporary Standing Order were all agreed to without a division.¹⁸ The temporary Standing Order, including the amendment (para 7A), as agreed by the House is set out in Box 2.

Box 2: Voting by proxy for parental absence (Temporary Standing Order)

- (1) A Member may, by reason of absence from the precincts of the House for childbirth or care of an infant or newly-adopted child, arrange for their vote to be cast in accordance with this order by another Member acting as a proxy (a proxy vote).
- (2) A proxy vote may be cast:
 - (a) in a division in the House, in Committee of the whole House, or in any legislative grand committee, in relation to the business specified in paragraph (3) below;
 - (b) on business specified in paragraph (3) below recorded in a division under Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions), and
 - (c) in a ballot cast in an election under Standing Order No. 1B (Election of Speaker by secret ballot), Standing Order No. 2A (Election of the Deputy Speakers) and Standing Order No. 122B (Election of select committee chairs).
- (3) Subject to paragraph (4) below, a proxy vote may be cast on [all public and private business of the House.
- (4) No proxy vote shall be cast in a division on any motion in the form specified in section 2(2) of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011.
- (5) No proxy vote shall be reckoned in the numbers participating in a division for the purposes of (a) Standing Order No. 41(1) (Quorum), and (b) Standing Order No. 37 (Majority for closure or for proposal of question).
- (6) A proxy vote may be cast only if the Speaker has certified that the Member for whom the vote is to be cast is eligible under the terms of this order and the Resolution of the House of Monday 28 January and if that certificate, including the name of the Member nominated as a proxy, has been published in the Votes and Proceedings.
- (7) A vote cast by a proxy shall be clearly indicated as such in the division lists published under the authority of the House.
- (7A) The Speaker may also make provision for the exercise of a proxy vote for Members who have suffered a miscarriage.
- (8) This Standing Order shall lapse upon the expiry of the proxy voting scheme established under the terms of this order and the Resolution of the House of Monday 28 January.¹⁹

1.2 Review of the Pilot Scheme

The Procedure Committee was directed to review the pilot arrangements within 12 months of the scheme coming into effect.²⁰

¹⁶ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 cc602-604](#)

¹⁷ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 cc610-611](#)

¹⁸ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 cc612-614](#)

¹⁹ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 c614](#)

²⁰ [HC Deb 28 January 2019 c613](#)

The decision on 16 January 2020, to extend the pilot scheme for six months, also extended to 18 months the time the Procedure Committee has to conduct its review.²¹ The further decision on 20 July 2020, to extend the pilot scheme, also extended the time the Procedure Committee has to conduct its review.

In the 2017 Parliament, the Committee began a review but had not completed it at dissolution.²²

The Committee held one oral evidence session, with Luciana Berger and Tulip Siddiq, both of whom had proxy votes under the pilot scheme.²³

The Government, in written evidence, commented that “the scheme and temporary standing order on which it is based have operated well”. The Government suggested that the Committee listened to the views of Members who had used the scheme. It asked the Committee for its view on excluding votes on any motion under the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* from the scheme. The Government also noted discussions about widening the scheme for health or caring reasons, or for select committee business. However, it said that it was “not supportive of extending proxy voting beyond the remit established in the pilot scheme”.²⁴

The Clerk of the House of Commons also concluded that “the system of proxy voting in the Lobbies has worked well”.²⁵

Both the Clerk and Members who had used the scheme suggested some amendments to the way it operated. But its users supported its permanent adoption. Ellie Reeves said that the scheme “should be adopted in full without further delay”. She called for it to be extended to 12 months.²⁶ Kemi Badenoch welcomed the scheme.²⁷ Chloe Smith was strongly in favour of the scheme and found it to work positively.²⁸

On 4 March 2020, at its first meeting in the 2019 Parliament, the new Procedure Committee revived the review. In a press notice, the Committee outlined the scope of its review:

The revived review will assess the practical operation of the scheme, considering the duration and scope for eligibility of proxy votes under the pilot and the administrative arrangements, including Speaker certification and the practicalities of casting proxy votes. The review will also look at the particular issues raised

²¹ [HC Deb 16 January 2020 c1266](#)

²² Procedure Committee, [Proxy voting: review of pilot arrangements inquiry](#) [2017 Parliament]

²³ Procedure Committee, [Proxy Voting: Review of Pilot Arrangements: Oral Evidence](#), 30 October 2019, HC 134 2017-19, Qq1-25

²⁴ Procedure Committee, [Proxy Voting: Review of Pilot Arrangements: Written Evidence submitted by HM Government](#), [PVC 03]

²⁵ Procedure Committee, [Proxy Voting: Review of Pilot Arrangements: Written Evidence from the Clerk of the House of Commons](#), [PVR 05]

²⁶ Procedure Committee, [Proxy Voting: Review of Pilot Arrangements: Written Evidence submitted by Ellie Reeves](#), [PVR 10]

²⁷ Procedure Committee, [Proxy Voting: Review of Pilot Arrangements: Written Evidence submitted by Kemi Badenoch](#), [PVR 09]

²⁸ Procedure Committee, [Proxy Voting: Review of Pilot Arrangements: Written Evidence submitted by Chloe Smith](#), [PVR 11]

for proxy voting by a dissolution of Parliament and the swearing in of MPs at the beginning of a new Parliament.²⁹

Recommendations of the review

The Procedure Committee's review of the pilot arrangements was published on 10 September 2020. The Committee considered both the arrangements for parental leave and those relating to the pandemic.³⁰

The Procedure Committee recommended that the proxy voting for parental absence scheme should be made permanent – in Standing Orders, with some technical modifications (allowing proxy votes to be counted in motions under the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* and for the election of all committee chairs).³¹ It found that experience of the scheme had been “broadly positive”; no issues of principle or major flaws were identified; and that its use was accepted across the House. It also observed that “The use of proxy voting as a means of accommodating parental absence appears to us to have been more transparent than the use of pairing”.³²

The Committee recommended that it should no longer be a requirement to produce a certificate of pregnancy or a matching certificate to qualify for a proxy vote. But certification for eligibility could be undertaken by any of the Deputy Speakers as well as the Speaker.³³

The Committee committed to examining whether there should be other grounds for qualifying for a proxy vote once arrangements for proxy voting for public health reasons had ended. It noted that the issue had been considered extensively, observing that it might require disclosing private personal or family information.³⁴

The Committee noted the importance of knowing at the beginning of a sitting day who was eligible for a proxy vote but it recommended that it should be possible to issue a certificate on a non-sitting day and treat it as if it were issued on the previous sitting day.³⁵

It recommended that eligibility for a proxy vote should begin four weeks before due date and end six months after the later of the due date or date of birth. Fathers or second adopters should be eligible for the two weeks of proxy voting in the first six months.³⁶

The Committee also recommended that under a permanent scheme, the information contained in every proxy voting certificate should be made available on a dedicated page on the parliamentary website.³⁷

²⁹ Procedure Committee news article, [Committee revive review into proxy voting pilot](#), 5 March 2020

³⁰ Procedure Committee; [Proxy voting: review of the pilot arrangements](#), 10 September 2020, HC 10 2019-21

³¹ *Ibid*, paras 25 and 115-123

³² *Ibid*, paras 23-24

³³ *Ibid*, paras 29 and 32

³⁴ *Ibid*, paras 33-37

³⁵ *Ibid*, para 42

³⁶ *Ibid*, paras 46 and 48

³⁷ *Ibid*, para 64

On the arrangements for proxy voting due to the pandemic, the Committee called for arrangements for self-certifying for proxy voting and participating in virtual proceedings to be aligned.³⁸ It recommended that the arrangements should continue “for as long as public health guidance or statutory provisions in any part of the UK has the effect of restricting the ability of Members to travel to Westminster”.³⁹

The Committee expressed concern that the “present infrastructure supporting the pass-reader division system is barely adequate, especially in respect of proxy voting”. It called for an alternative to be found.⁴⁰

It considered that the remote voting system using while Members could participate remotely in both scrutiny and substantive business was more effective. It recommended that remote voting be reinstated.⁴¹

³⁸ *Ibid*, para 88

³⁹ *Ibid*, para 94

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, paras 108-111

⁴¹ *Ibid*, para 113

2. Background to the introduction of the pilot scheme

On 1 February 2018, at the conclusion of a Backbench Business debate, initiated by Harriet Harman, the House resolved that:

That this House believes that it would be to the benefit of the functioning of parliamentary democracy that honourable Members who have had a baby or adopted a child should for a period of time be entitled, but not required, to discharge their responsibilities to vote in this House by proxy.⁴²

Following that debate, the Procedure Committee conducted an inquiry in which it considered how the House's decision in principle might operate in practice.

The Procedure Committee's report, *Proxy voting and parental absence*, was published on 15 May 2018.⁴³ The Committee brought forward proposals for a non-compulsory scheme for proxy voting that would require some changes to Standing Orders. It recommended that the scheme should operate under the authority of the Speaker, who would certify the appointment of a proxy.

Before this, the Leader of the House of Commons, Andrea Leadsom had written to Charles Walker, the Chair of the Procedure Committee, in November 2017. She noted that the issue had become "increasingly prominent".⁴⁴ It had been raised in *The Good Parliament* report, which addressed diversity insensitivities in the House of Commons. The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion, convened to consider *The Good Parliament*, had "agreed that the solution to this issue would be to provide Baby Leave for MPs and adequate representation of their constituents in Parliament (proxy votes), through a resolution of the House".⁴⁵

Following the publication of the Procedure Committee's report, there were calls for it to be considered quickly as a number of MPs were expecting babies.

The Government scheduled a general debate on the principle of proxy voting on 5 July 2018. However, because statements earlier in the day ate into the time for the debate, it did not take place.⁴⁶ At Business Questions on 21 June, Andrea Leadsom, the Leader of the House, noted that the Government was scheduled to reply to the Procedure Committee's report by 15 July. She explained why she had provided

⁴² [HC Deb 1 February 2018 c1051](#) A debate pack was published in advance of this debate: *Baby leave for Members of Parliament*, CDP 2018-0023, 30 January 2018

⁴³ Procedure Committee, [Proxy voting and parental absence](#), 15 May 2018, HC 825 2017-19

⁴⁴ Procedure Committee, [Letter from the Leader of the House of Commons on Proxy voting and Baby Leave for Members of Parliament, 30 November 2017](#), published on 20 March 2018

⁴⁵ Procedure Committee, [Letter from the Leader of the House of Commons on Proxy voting and Baby Leave for Members of Parliament, 30 November 2017](#), published on 20 March 2018

⁴⁶ [HC Deb 5 July 2018 cc547-552](#)

time for the debate before the Government responded to the Procedure Committee:

I wanted to have that general debate, so that the constitutional implications of proxy voting, as opposed to other forms of formalised pairing, for example, and who should operate proxy voting if it were to be introduced and so on, can be properly aired in this place before I give a considered response to the work of the Procedure Committee, for which I am very grateful.⁴⁷

In the *House Magazine*, 28 June 2018, Harriet Harman, Maria Miller and Hannah Bardell argued that the time had come to introduce proxy voting in the House of Commons. They argued that:

Seeing an eight months pregnant Jo Swinson carefully navigate her way through the division lobby last week has given added impetus to cross party calls for MPs to be able to vote by proxy when they are having a baby or adopting a child.⁴⁸

Andrea Leadsom wrote to the Procedure Committee, on 12 July 2018.⁴⁹ She told the Committee that wider issues around proxy voting needed to be considered before the House could take a decision.

The breaking of a pair, involving Jo Swinson, a new mother, on 17 July 2018 also focused attention on the question of introducing proxy voting for maternity, paternity and adoption leave.

On 19 July 2018, Andrea Leadsom announced that “there will be a debate on proxy voting in the second week of September”.⁵⁰

On 6 September, Ms Leadsom confirmed that the debate would take place on Thursday 13 September and that it would be a general debate. She also told that the House that a debate on a substantive motion would follow as soon as practicably possible.⁵¹

In the debate on 13 September 2018, Andrea Leadsom confirmed that she intended “to bring forward a substantive motion as soon as possible”.⁵²

On 14 January 2019, Harriet Harman raised a point of order to express concern that proxy voting had not yet been introduced. She noted that Tulip Siddiq was due to have a caesarean the following day – the day of the votes on the Government’s EU withdrawal agreement and the framework for the future relations (the “meaningful vote”) – and commented that “She should not have to choose between going through the Division Lobby in a wheelchair while nine months pregnant, having postponed her caesarean, and losing her right to vote”. She asked the Speaker whether he could arrange a proxy vote for Tulip Siddiq.⁵³

⁴⁷ [HC Deb 21 June 2018 c481](#)

⁴⁸ Harriet Harman, Maria Miller and Hannah Bardell, “[Cross-party call for proxy voting: it’s time to move into the 21st century](#)”, *House Magazine*, 28 June 2018

⁴⁹ Procedure Committee, [Letter from the Leader of the House of Commons on proxy voting](#), 12 July 2018 [published 18 July 2018]

⁵⁰ [HC Deb 19 July 2018 c597](#)

⁵¹ [HC Deb 6 September 2018 c325](#)

⁵² [HC Deb 13 September 2018 c965](#)

⁵³ [HC Deb 14 January 2019 c809](#)

16 Proxy voting in divisions in the House

In response, the Speaker said that proxy voting could not be arranged for the following day. He said that “Personally, I think it preferable that the hon. Lady should have a proxy vote, but that seems to me to depend on cross-party agreement”. He noted when the House had previously taken decisions on and debated proxy voting and said that it was “extremely regrettable that almost a year after the first debate, and more than four months after the second debate, the change has not been made”.⁵⁴

He re-iterated his disappointment in response to a further point of order on 15 January.⁵⁵

On 21 January 2019, the *Times* reported that the Government Chief Whip was trying to obstruct the introduction of proxy voting while he was trying to “steer Theresa May’s Brexit deal through the Commons”.⁵⁶

On 22 January 2019, in response to an Urgent Question, Andrea Leadsom, the Leader of the House of Commons, announced that the House would be asked to approve a motion and a temporary Standing Order to implement a year-long pilot to facilitate baby leave for Members of Parliament.⁵⁷

On 24 January 2019, at Business Questions, the Leader said the motions would be debated on 28 January.⁵⁸

As noted in section 1, the pilot scheme was agreed to by the House on 28 January 2019, and implemented the following day.

The rest of this briefing paper outlines the events in the year from the House agreeing that a proxy voting scheme would be beneficial to the decision to implement the pilot scheme.

⁵⁴ [HC Deb 14 January 2019 cc809-810](#)

⁵⁵ [HC Deb 15 January 2019 cc1128-1129](#)

⁵⁶ Esther Webber, “Chief Whip blamed for delaying proxy vote for MPs on maternity leave”, *Times*, 21 January 2019

⁵⁷ [HC Deb 22 January 2019 c144](#)

⁵⁸ [HC Deb 24 January 2019 c353](#)

3. Procedure Committee recommendations

3.1 Committee report

In the light of the House's decision on 1 February 2018 that it believed that Members who have had a baby or adopted a child should be entitled but not required to vote by proxy in the House, the Procedure Committee considered the matter.

The Procedure Committee's report, *Proxy voting and parental absence*, was published on 15 May 2018.⁵⁹ The Committee brought forward proposals for a non-compulsory scheme for proxy voting that would require some changes to Standing Orders. It recommended that the scheme should operate under the authority of the Speaker, who would certify the appointment of a proxy.

Eligibility for and duration of the availability of proxy voting

The Procedure Committee recommended that "proxy voting ought to be available to new mothers, new fathers and adoptive parents".⁶⁰

In line with proposals from the Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion:

- Eligibility would be confirmed by producing either a certificate of pregnancy or a 'matching certificate' from a registered adoption agency to the Speaker.
- The dispensation to vote by proxy would be:
 - "Six months for the biological mother of a baby, or for the primary or single adopter of a baby or child;
 - "Two weeks for the biological father of a baby, the partner of the person giving birth or the second adopter of a baby or child".⁶¹

The Committee recommended that any period of absence should be continuous. For a mother or primary adopter that period should be six months and for a father, partner or second adopter it should be two weeks. The Member would specify the start and end dates to the Speaker who would issue a certificate. The certificate would be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.⁶²

The Committee proposed that an extension to the period should be permitted. It cited the example of an expectant mother being unable to travel to Westminster by air, and proposed that the period in which the proxy vote was valid be extended by four weeks.⁶³

The [Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion](#) has been convened by the Speaker to consider [The Good Parliament](#) (2016) report and take forward its recommendations.

⁵⁹ Procedure Committee, [Proxy voting and parental absence](#), 15 May 2018, HC 825 2017-19

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, para 44

⁶¹ *Ibid*, paras 45-46

⁶² *Ibid*, paras 47-49

⁶³ *Ibid*, para 50

Appointment of a proxy

The Committee concluded that “Members ought to be free to choose any other Member of the House who is eligible to vote in divisions to act as a proxy. That Member will be named in the certificate issued by the Speaker”.⁶⁴

The Committee also suggested that if the Member wished to vote in person at any time, they should be able to but would need to give notice to the Speaker on the previous sitting day. This would allow a new certificate to be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.⁶⁵

Recording the proxy vote

Although the Committee said that detailed arrangements for recording votes would be arranged by officials, it said that “Where a proxy vote is cast, it must be recorded in a transparent way”.⁶⁶

When could a proxy vote be exercised?

The Committee heard a range of views on when a proxy vote ought to be available for use. The Committee recommended that the House consider three options for the categories of business where proxy voting may be used:

- Decisions on all items of public and private business;
- Decisions on all items of public and private business taken on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays; or
- Decisions on all items of Government business (that is, all orders of the day on Government bills and all motions moved by a Minister of the Crown).⁶⁷

The Committee identified two occasions when a proxy vote should not be used and also discussed when a proxy vote ought not be used.

It considered that a proxy vote should not be used on a vote for an early general election, when a majority voting in favour of the motion has to be equal to or greater than two-thirds of the number of seats in the House. It echoed the Clerk of the House’s concern that because the two-thirds majority was a statutory provision, a decision taken on the basis of proxy votes would be open to judicial review. The Committee did not consider that “a similar risk of challenge arises to decisions with statutory effect which are taken in the House by simple majority”.⁶⁸

In relation to calculating a quorum in the House, the Committee commented and concluded that:

The Clerk of the House observed that: “It would be odd if absent people constituted what is effectively a quorum”. We agree. ***We recommend that votes cast by proxy shall not be reckoned for the purposes of ascertaining, under Standing Order No. 41(1), whether fewer than forty Members have taken part in a division.***⁶⁹

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, para 53

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, paras 56-57

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, paras 58-60

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, para 68

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, paras 71-73

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, para 75

The Committee concluded that the House ought to determine whether proxy votes ought to be counted in reckoning the majority for a closure.

In addition to these procedural questions, the Committee reported that:

Some witnesses considered that certain types of decision ought not to be taken on the strength of proxy votes. In particular there were strong reservations about the use of proxy votes on decisions to commit troops to combat, particularly where a motion might pass or fail on the strength of proxies.⁷⁰

It concluded that:

There is an inherent risk to the House's reputation of Members away from the House casting votes as if they are present in the Chamber and actively following debates. For example, it would be unthinkable, in our view, for a motion on committing military personnel to armed conflict to be carried on the basis of proxy votes. We are confident that Members will bear the reputation of the House in mind when choosing whether to use a proxy vote, and weigh this factor in their decision making.⁷¹

The Committee undertook to review any arrangements introduced and report on them within 12 months of their introduction.⁷²

3.2 Andrea Leadsom's response

Letter to the Procedure Committee

Andrea Leadsom wrote to Charles Walker, the Chair of the Procedure Committee, on 12 July 2018. She thanked the Committee for its report and expressed her disappointment that the 5 July debate did not go ahead.⁷³

She stated that "The integrity of the voting system in the House of Commons must be above reproach". Consequently, changes should only be made after careful consideration. She believed that some outstanding issues remained.

Ms Leadsom noted that because it had been given the specific objective of devising a proxy voting system for parental leave, the Committee had not considered alternative approaches – such as formalised pairing. She also raised the question of extending proxy voting to those suffering long-term illness or bereavement. She noted that the Committee had posed questions about the types of businesses that proxy voting should be used for. Leaving decisions about the circumstances in which a proxy vote was used to the discretion of Members could lead to unwanted criticism.

She stressed the importance of considering these issues to ensure that the House was aware of "all the implications of any potential changes".

The Committee published Andrea Leadsom's letter on 18 July.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, para 82

⁷¹ *Ibid*, para 83

⁷² *Ibid*, para 92

⁷³ Procedure Committee, [Letter from the Leader of the House of Commons on proxy voting](#), 12 July 2018 [published 18 July 2018]

Debate announced

At Business Questions on 19 July 2018, Andrea Leadsom announced that “there will be a debate on proxy voting in the second week of the September sitting”.⁷⁴ On 6 September, she confirmed that a general debate on proxy voting would be held on Thursday 13 September.⁷⁵

In response to Valerie Vaz’s question, on 19 July, about holding the debate before the House rose for the summer recess, Andrea Leadsom explained that:

I genuinely feel that it is important we have that debate, so that issues can be raised: potential unintended consequences, and the very key points about when a proxy vote should be used and who it should be used by. I am very keen that all Members get the chance to do that and I am aware that many Members would not be here to take part in the debate if it were on Monday. I hope she accepts that. I will be bringing it forward as soon as possible.⁷⁶

Subsequently, it was reported that the Government would table a motion on proxy voting for debate in September. The *Sunday Times* reported that “Under the proposals, new parents, or MPs who are seriously ill, could appoint a stand-in from their own party to vote on their behalf, according to a senior Whitehall source”.⁷⁷ However, when he responded to an Urgent Question on pairing on 23 July 2018, David Lidington, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, said that debate in September would be a general debate,⁷⁸ meaning no decisions on implementing a system of proxy voting would be taken at that point. As noted above, Andrea Leadsom confirmed that the September debate would be a general debate. She also announced that a debate on a substantive motion would follow as soon as practicably possible.

This development followed apologies from the Government after Brandon Lewis voted in divisions on 17 July 2018, despite being paired with Jo Swinson, whose second child was born on 29 June 2018.

3.3 General debate on proxy voting, September 2018

In the debate on proxy voting on 13 September 2018, Andrea Leadsom said that it was an opportunity for all views to be heard. She wanted to explore “all the options to ensure that new mothers and fathers can effectively represent their constituents, while at the same time allowing them to secure that vital early bond with their babies”.

She said that this would be a “significant change to our voting practices and procedures, whereby Members for the first time ever, will not have to be present to vote”.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ [HC Deb 19 July 2018 c597](#)

⁷⁵ [HC Deb 6 September 2018 c325](#)

⁷⁶ [HC Deb 19 July 2018 c599](#)

⁷⁷ Caroline Wheeler, “MPs to get proxy vote after Julian Smith pairing row”, *Sunday Times*, 22 July 2018,

⁷⁸ [HC Deb 23 July 2018 c738](#); [cc745-746](#)

⁷⁹ [HC Deb 16 September 2018 c915](#)

She set out the issues she would like to hear views on:

- Whether proxy voting should be limited to new parents;
- What support should be offered to those who lost a child;
- For what types of business proxy voting should be available; and
- The merits of the existing system – pairing and nodding through.⁸⁰

Valerie Vaz, the Shadow Leader of the House, indicated her support for introducing proxy voting. She acknowledged that business managers had supported women when they needed to be away from the House of Commons but that now Members considered this “should become a right”. She outlined a way in which a proxy voting scheme could work – through a representative of the party concerned.⁸¹ In her closing speech, she argued that “Proxy voting is a choice tied up with the business of the House. It is right that the business managers should manage the business. ... Members who use proxy voting should not have to spend time finding a proxy. I hope that the process I outlined earlier can be considered”.⁸²

A number of Members argued that it was important that individual Members chose their own proxy. Charles Walker, Chair of the Procedure Committee, said “I do not want the Whips to be involved with this”.⁸³

He said that the proxy mechanism should work alongside pairing. Pairing was “important for maintaining anonymity”: if a Member had to declare why they had a proxy vote, it would “remove the cloak of anonymity”. He also argued that proxy voting was a means of “allowing as many women as possible to choose to come to this place, get elected to this place and, once here, prosper in this place”.⁸⁴

Sir David Evennett, another member of the Procedure Committee, also agreed that there was no need to end the pairing system. He said that the proxy voting proposal was a “one-off”, and that it was important to implement it as soon possible.⁸⁵

Alison Thewliss, for the SNP, also wanted to see proxy voting, noting that pairing “disenfranchises two Members” and that it was difficult to explain an opaque system to constituents. She noted the discussion on extending proxy voting to other health issues but suggested going ahead with proxy voting for baby leave first and seeing how it worked.⁸⁶

Helen Whately argued that proxy voting’s advantage over pairing was that enabled Members to continue to use their vote. She questioned whether enough time was allowed for fathers who could need a longer period than two weeks.⁸⁷ David Linden outlined his experience as the

⁸⁰ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 cc915-916](#)

⁸¹ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 cc918-919](#)

⁸² [HC Deb 13 September 2018 c961](#)

⁸³ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 c920](#); see also Bob Blackman, [c939](#); Ellie Reeves, [c944](#)

⁸⁴ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 cc920-921](#)

⁸⁵ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 c926](#)

⁸⁶ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 cc929-930](#)

⁸⁷ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 cc934-935](#)

father of a premature baby who spent two weeks in intensive care and a further week in a special care baby unit.⁸⁸

Harriet Harman supported both proxy voting and pairing systems operating side-by-side, saying that “the transparency of proxy voting works well with maternity and paternity, and the discretion and personal approach allowed for under pairing work better for bereavement and sickness”.

She also said that she would apply for a Backbench Business debate if the motion was not forthcoming.⁸⁹

Bob Blackman, a member of the Procedure Committee, considered when proxies should be used, how they should be exercised and whether they could be used to cover compassionate leave or illness. He opposed proxies being exercised by whips. He supported the introduction of a system that was subject to review.⁹⁰

Vicky Ford compared a proxy vote which was “positively registered” to pairing, when Members “step back and neither person votes”. She said that Members “would like to see their positive support for a policy on record”.⁹¹

Patricia Gibson called for wider use of proxy voting. She suggested that it should cover illness; Members with spouses or family members with illness; and bereavement leave following the death of child or partner.⁹²

Emma Reynolds set out why she thought the pairing system fell down. First, pairs could be suspended or broken; second, new mums “have been attacked for missing votes”; and third, “Only proxy voting, not pairing, will allow Members who are new parents to represent their constituents and vote in parliament by nominating a colleague – not a whip! – to vote on their behalf”.⁹³

Justin Madders welcomed the concept of proxy voting for baby leave “as a sensible first step”. He believed that it should go further. He argued there were other reasons for Members’ absence – personal or medical reason; official business – that should allow Members to qualify for a proxy vote.⁹⁴

Andrea Leadsom summarised the comments of those who spoken and confirmed that she would bring forward a “substantive motion as soon as possible”.⁹⁵ She drew a number of conclusions from the debate:

- Limiting proxy voting to baby leave for privacy reasons resonated;
- Being paired was not good enough – votes need to be recorded;

⁸⁸ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 c957](#)

⁸⁹ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 cc937-938](#)

⁹⁰ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 cc938-941](#)

⁹¹ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 c946](#)

⁹² [HC Deb 13 September 2018 c947](#)

⁹³ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 c953](#)

⁹⁴ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 c954](#)

⁹⁵ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 c965](#)

- There was broad support for a pilot scheme, which she suggested should be time-limited so that it could be evaluated.⁹⁶

She said that she was “minded to accept the majority of the recommendations of the Procedure Committee’s report, which provides a good basis for a pilot scheme”.⁹⁷

3.4 Urgent Question on the obstacles to introducing proxy voting (22 January 2019)

On 22 January 2019, in response to an Urgent Question from Jo Swinson, Andrea Leadsom announced that the House would be asked to approve a motion and a temporary Standing Order to implement a year-long pilot to facilitate baby leave for Members of Parliament. The intention was that the question on the motions is put without debate, on Monday 28 January.⁹⁸

As noted above (in section 2), the Urgent Question followed complaints on in the previous week about the delay in bringing forward a decision proxy voting and press reports that the decision was being delayed whilst decisions on Brexit were still to be taken.

The motion reaffirmed the resolution of 1 February 2018 on baby leave; endorsed the Procedure Committee’s report; directed the Speaker to prepare a pilot scheme; and provided for its implementation and a review after 12 months.⁹⁹ (The temporary Standing Order, as agreed by the House, is set out in Box 2, in section 1 of this briefing paper.) reflects proposals made by the Procedure Committee in May 2018.

The Speaker confirmed that he would “ensure that I have a scheme ready to be activated, so that Members can rapidly—indeed, I think instantly—apply for a proxy vote, and their nominated proxy can then cast that vote the next day”.¹⁰⁰

Andrea Leadsom’s announcement was widely welcomed.¹⁰¹ However, some Members expressed concern that the motion be taken on the nod,¹⁰² and there were requests for a debate.¹⁰³

Andrea Leadsom said that “in the event that somebody regrettably decides to object on Monday, I will table a substantive motion as soon as possible”.¹⁰⁴ Subsequently at Business Questions on 24 January 2019, she announced that the motions would be debated on 28 January.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁶ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 cc961-964](#)

⁹⁷ [HC Deb 13 September 2018 c964](#)

⁹⁸ [HC Deb 22 January 2019 c144](#); c150; c157 [response to Rachel Reeves]

⁹⁹ House of Commons, Order Paper, 23 January 2019, [Remaining Orders](#), Item 114

¹⁰⁰ [HC Deb 22 January 2019 cc147-148](#)

¹⁰¹ For example, HC Deb 22 January 2019 [c149](#), [c150](#), [c153](#); and Jo Swinson congratulated on the announcement [[c145](#)]

¹⁰² HC Deb 22 January 2019 [c157](#), [c158](#), [c162](#)

¹⁰³ HC Deb 22 January 2019 [cc160-161](#), [c161](#)

¹⁰⁴ HC Deb 22 January 2019 [c160](#)

¹⁰⁵ [HC Deb 24 January 2019 c353](#)

24 Proxy voting in divisions in the House

Some Members continued to press for the retention of pairing¹⁰⁶ and for proxy voting to be available in other circumstances, such as illness.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ HC Deb 22 January 2019 [c154](#)

¹⁰⁷ HC Deb 22 January 2019 [cc156-157](#), [cc159-160](#)

4. Proxy voting or pairing?

An alternative to proxy voting is to continue the practice of pairing either as currently, on an informal basis (overseen by whips), or in a more formalised way. Erskine May's description of pairing is set out in Box 3.

Box 3: Pairing

A system known as 'pairing' enables a Member to be absent, and to agree with another Member to be absent at the same time. By this mutual agreement, a vote is neutralised on each side of a question, and the actual size of the majority is not affected. The practice of pairing is not officially recognised in the procedures of the House; it is therefore conducted privately by individual Members, or arranged by the Whips of the respective parties. The Speaker has ruled that agreements to pair are private arrangements between Members and in no sense matters in which either he or the House can intervene.¹⁰⁸

4.1 Pairing – a short background

Use of pairing

Evidence from the last 60 years suggests that systematic use of pairing depends upon the political arithmetic in Parliament. For instance, Rush says it did not operate between 1997 and 2005, due to Labour's large majority at that time.¹⁰⁹ It was also barely used in the 1950 Parliament, the three-line whip being resorted to routinely, as Labour had a majority of five.¹¹⁰ In evidence to a Procedure Committee inquiry in 1958, the then Clerk of the House imagined that "'pairs' are more easily obtainable when Government majorities are large". He had the impression that "the result of the small majorities, in the 1950 and 1951 Parliaments has been to increase the number of occasions on which 'pairing' is not permitted".¹¹¹

Pairing has also been suspended at times of political disagreement. Radice, Vallance and Willis say that Labour did not allow pairing in the 1983-87 Parliament.¹¹² Harrison also mentions Labour instituting a ban on pairing in 1954, which followed inter-party disagreement over increases in Members' pay.¹¹³ Gyles Brandreth refers in his memoirs to an occasion in November 1996, when the Conservative whip paired three members with colleagues from both the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties – losing six votes for the opposition compared with three for the Government. This caused a cessation of co-operation from the Opposition parties for the rest of the 1992 Parliament.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Erskine May, *Parliamentary Practice*, 25th edition, 2019, [para 20.87](#)

¹⁰⁹ Michael Rush (ed.), *Parliament Today*, MUP, Manchester, 2005, p.147

¹¹⁰ Peter G Richards, *Honourable Members*, Faber and Faber, London, 1959, p.84

¹¹¹ Memo from the Clerk of the House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Procedure*, HC 92-I 1958-59, evidence p.17

¹¹² Lianne Radice, Elizabeth Vallance and Virginia Willis, *Member of Parliament*, 1987, p.82

¹¹³ Wilfrid Harrison, "The British Constitution in 1954", *Parliamentary Affairs* 8:3, 303-317, 1954, p.312

¹¹⁴ Gyles Brandreth, *Breaking the Code*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, p.426.

Pairing whips

There are records of ‘pairing whips’ in existence since at least 1951, and of formal records being kept since 1964.¹¹⁵ Rush and Ettinghausen note that arrangements between Government and opposition whips occurred unsystematically through the 19th century, with the ‘usual channels’ becoming known as the route for these arrangements in the early 20th century (the phrase ‘the usual channels’ is first recorded in 1905).¹¹⁶

The system is also used to ensure overseas visits do not lead to an imbalance in voting outcomes – for instance, by ensuring that pairs, or at least equal numbers from either side, make a visit together.

Pairing books

The 1958 Procedure Committee enquiry also produced evidence that there was a ‘pairing book’ in existence until the Second World War, in which Members seeking a pair would write their names:

There used to be a book kept in the ‘No’ Division Lobby, in which a person who wanted a pair entered his name and stated the time at which he wanted it, and then if there was a Member on the other side who was willing to accommodate him he put his name in it too. ... I think that book remained in existence until the war of 1939... until the beginning of the war and then when the Coalition Government was formed pairing, except on one fateful evening, did not matter.¹¹⁷

4.2 Pairing and proxy voting

The issue of pairing was highlighted in the summer of 2018 when Brandon Lewis apologised to Jo Swinson for breaking their pair in two divisions at Report Stage of the *Trade Bill 2017-19*, on 17 July 2018.¹¹⁸

Following that apology, Alistair Carmichael, the Liberal Democrat Chief Whip, successfully applied for Urgent Questions on proxy voting and on pairing, on 18 and 23 July 2018 respectively.

Urgent Question on proxy voting (18 July 2018)

On 18 July, Mr Carmichael argued that it was not right to rely on pairing to provide maternity, paternity and adoption leave for Members and asked the Leader of the House to reconvene talks between the parties “with a view to devising a sensible and workable solution to this problem”.¹¹⁹

In her initial response, Andrea Leadsom confirmed that the “Government Whips Office has undertaken always to pair Opposition MPs on maternity leave from the start to the end of their leave, without

¹¹⁵ Robert J. Jackson, *Rebels and Whips*, Macmillan, London, 1968, p.42

¹¹⁶ Michael Rush and Clare Ettinghausen, *Opening up the Usual Channels*, Hansard Society, 2000, p.7

¹¹⁷ House of Commons Procedure Committee, *Report from the Select Committee on Procedure*, HC 92-I 1958-59, para 571.

¹¹⁸ [HC Deb 18 July 2018 cc427-428](#)

¹¹⁹ HC Deb 18 July 2018 c428

applying any conditions".¹²⁰ She restated the comments that she made in her letter in response to the Procedure Committee, saying that it had:

... raised a number of questions on which it will be important for us to consult in this Chamber before we make a final decision. Let me remind colleagues of some of them: when should a proxy be used; should it be used for every type of vote, including those on going to war or a closure motion, when, as we know, colleagues should be present in the Chamber; and should it apply to all business, private as well as public, or only to Government business. There is also the contested question of whether it should apply only to baby leave or to other circumstances. That is why I am so keen to have a debate in this place before we come to conclusions.¹²¹

Valerie Vaz called for "proxy voting for those on baby leave" to be introduced "urgently".¹²² But Andrea Leadsom again warned that "There are unintended consequences and implications of any solution we choose, and it is important that the House has the opportunity to debate the issue".¹²³

In the subsequent exchanges, Members suggested that if proxy voting were introduced, it should cover sickness,¹²⁴ and compassionate leave.¹²⁵ Others pressed for the decision to be taken as soon as possible.¹²⁶ Others noted that pairing usually worked successfully,¹²⁷ and that it could be made to be more transparent.¹²⁸

Pete Wishart described the current voting arrangements as "the absurd waste of time of a headcount in cramped voting Lobbies". He argued that "to be disenfranchised for having a baby in 2018 demonstrates just how out of touch this archaic place is and how these arrangements should embarrass and shame this House". He said that the system should be reformed now and that he supported the Procedure Committee's proposals, saying, "All we have to do is agree and accept it. Surely now the Leader of the House can bring this forward at the earliest opportunity".¹²⁹ Patrick Grady called for "not only proxy voting but fixed decision times and electronic voting".¹³⁰

During the course of the Urgent Question, the Speaker noted that he had given evidence to the Procedure Committee. He told the House that he would be happy to play his part in operating a baby leave system, and that he hoped a decision would be taken quickly:

... I made it clear that I was personally perfectly happy with the idea of a proxy voting system in respect of baby leave in particular

¹²⁰ HC Deb 18 July 2018 c427

¹²¹ HC Deb 18 July 2018 c429

¹²² HC Deb 18 July 2018 c430

¹²³ HC Deb 18 July 2018 c431

¹²⁴ HC Deb 18 July 2018 c429

¹²⁵ HC Deb 18 July 2018 cc432-433

¹²⁶ HC Deb 18 July 2018 c437

¹²⁷ HC Deb 18 July 2018 c433

¹²⁸ HC Deb 18 July 2018 c437

¹²⁹ HC Deb 18 July 2018 c431

¹³⁰ HC Deb 18 July 2018 c435. The Library Briefing Paper on [Electronic recording of divisions](#) (CBP 7504, 12 February 2016) provides some background on calls for electronic voting to be introduced in the House of Commons

and that I would be happy to play my part in the operation of such a system.

For what it is worth, I think it is qualitatively in a different category from other requests for proxy voting, but that is a matter for the House to decide. The only other thing I would like to say, which is not directed at any one individual at all, is that I detect in the House and in representations made privately to me a very strong sense not merely that we should debate the issue again soon but that we should decide the issue and, if a change is agreed on, give effect to it. Obviously, if a change is not agreed on, that does not arise, but I think that there is concern about a potentially endless debate, which I feel absolutely sure the Leader of the House would not want and which I would not want. With good will, perhaps, and I think I speak for people on both sides of the argument, we can resolve the matter. I am sure that people would not want endless procrastination.¹³¹

Urgent Question on pairing (23 July 2018)

On 23 July, David Lidington, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, replied to Mr Carmichael's Urgent Question requesting "a statement in relation to Government policy and practice with regard to pairing arrangements, especially as they relate to Members on maternity, paternity or adoption leave".

Mr Lidington reiterated the apology made to Jo Swinson and said that "The Government's policy on pairing remains that these are long-standing informal arrangements between business managers in different political parties in this House, co-ordinated through the usual channels". He also confirmed that "this Government have no plans to change those underlying arrangements".¹³²

He said that the debate on proxy voting that would take place in September "will give Members the opportunity to consider the various questions arising from the recent report of the Procedure Committee into proxy voting". He outlined the questions that had already been raised about the report:

I know that Members have questions about whether such arrangements should be extended beyond maternity, paternity and adoption leave to those who, for example, have been bereaved or who have caring responsibilities for close relatives. It is important that the House be given time to debate those questions as, from my experience, such changes are made most effectively when they command consensus across the House.¹³³

In response to calls for a votable motion in September, Mr Lidington noted that "the Leader of the House is eager to talk to Members from all parties in the House about the way forward".¹³⁴

He also confirmed that "the Chief Whip has undertaken to use the summer recess to carry out a review of the internal arrangements within the Government Whips Office to try to make certain that this type of

¹³¹ HC Deb 18 July 2018 cc429-430

¹³² [HC Deb 23 July 2018 c738](#)

¹³³ *Ibid*

¹³⁴ HC Deb 23 July 2018 c747

error, which should not have occurred, can be prevented in the future".¹³⁵

A number of Conservative backbenchers noted that pairing was an informal arrangement¹³⁶ that generally worked well.¹³⁷ When Peter Bone called for transparency in pairing arrangements, Mr Lidington noted the "pastoral role" played by the Whips Offices and said that when Members were suffering ill health or family or personal stress it was not right for pairing arrangements to be made public.¹³⁸ Rachel Maclean noted the flexibility of the current arrangements, saying "there is no time limit for new mums", and called for it to continue.¹³⁹ In response to Andrew Jones, Mr Lidington agreed that the current system should be maintained.¹⁴⁰

Pete Wishart for the SNP argued again for "a total review of all our broken voting arrangements in this House".¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ HC Deb 23 July 2018 c743

¹³⁶ HC Deb 23 July 2018 c742

¹³⁷ HC Deb 23 July 2018 c746

¹³⁸ HC Deb 23 July 2018 c743; c750. For more on the pastoral role of whips, see: Andrew Defty, "[The pastoral role of the party whips](#)", *PSA Parliaments Group Blog*, 7 November 2018

¹³⁹ HC Deb 23 July 2018 c748

¹⁴⁰ HC Deb 23 July 2018 c749

¹⁴¹ HC Deb 23 July 2018 c742

5. Debate on Baby leave in the House of Commons (1 February 2018)

5.1 Background

A Backbench Business debate on baby leave for Members of Parliament took place on 1 February 2018,¹⁴² following an application from Harriet Harman, on 5 December 2017.¹⁴³

At that time, arrangements regarding maternity, paternity, parental, adoption, and caring leave for Members were entirely informal and arranged by political parties.

5.2 The Debate

The motion for the debate was:

That this House believes that it would be to the benefit of the functioning of parliamentary democracy that hon. Members who have had a baby or adopted a child should for a period of time be entitled, but not required, to discharge their responsibilities to vote in this House by proxy.

In her introductory remarks, Harriet Harman, who opened the debate, noted the widespread support she had received in applying for the debate. She then outlined why she had made the application to the Backbench Business Committee:

This motion asks the House for its in-principle agreement to make arrangements for when a Member has a baby or adopts a child. At the moment, we have no such arrangements. In this House, we set the rules for parents outside the House having babies or adopting a child, and we do so because we think that it is important for the child and for the parents. We do it because we want new parents not to have to ask for favours, but to be clear about where they stand. But there is no such system for Members of this House.¹⁴⁴

During the course of the debate, Cat Smith, who was “one of those Members with a growing bump” highlighted the urgency of the issue.¹⁴⁵ Harriet Harman reported that “There have already been 17 babies born to women Members since 2010”.¹⁴⁶

Andrea Leadsom highlighted some of the issues that would need to be considered by the Procedure Committee in the course of its inquiry:

The motion before the House presents two issues for consideration. The first is the need for Members of Parliament to take baby leave. I think we can all agree that new parents must

¹⁴² [HC Deb 1 February 2018 cc1013-1051](#)

¹⁴³ Backbench Business Committee, *Representations, 5 December 2017*, Qq1-6

¹⁴⁴ [HC Deb 1 February 2018 c1013](#)

¹⁴⁵ Andrea Leadsom welcomed Cat Smith back to the House, after her maternity leave, during exchanges after the Urgent Question on proxy voting on 22 January 2019 [[HC Deb 22 January 2019 cc154-155](#)]

¹⁴⁶ [HC Deb 1 February 2018 c1013](#); [HC Deb 1 February 2018 c1016](#)

spend time with their babies and be enabled to do that. The second issue concerns how we reconcile that with the question of how and whether Members should be able to vote in the House of Commons during any such leave.¹⁴⁷

She said that giving Members the right to baby leave raised the following potential questions about the duties of Members:

- “Introducing baby leave might lead some to suggest that MPs should be treated as employees, which could of course have wider implications”.
- “The introduction of proxy voting would also mark a departure from conventional voting practices in the House in several ways. For example, when Members vote in a Division, it is expected that they do so having had the opportunity to attend the Chamber”.
- “It is important to note that Members of Parliament are elected by their constituencies as individuals, so it is implied upon their election that their votes cannot be transferred to another MP. The appointment of a proxy voter could be perceived as a reduction of personal accountability. Any changes will therefore need to ensure that personal accountability is maintained”.

She also noted that alternative approaches to meeting the needs of new parents were available.¹⁴⁸

An alternative approach suggested on many occasions was to strengthen the pairing arrangements, whereby an MP on each side of the Commons is permitted to miss a vote. However, concerns have been expressed that pairing lacks transparency, although on some occasions this is deliberate to protect private personal or family information.

At the end of the debate, the motion was agreed to without a debate.¹⁴⁹

Background information

A debate pack was published in advance of this debate: [Baby leave for Members of Parliament](#), CDP 2018-0023, 30 January 2018.

¹⁴⁷ [HC Deb 1 February 2018 c1048](#)

¹⁴⁸ [HC Deb 1 February 2018 cc1049-1050](#)

¹⁴⁹ [HC Deb 1 February 2018 c1051](#)

6. Pre-pilot arrangements and calls for change

6.1 Pre-pilot arrangements for MPs who become parents

Maternity and paternity leave

Members, as office holders, do not qualify for maternity or paternity leave. They continue to receive their parliamentary salary unless they are suspended from the service of the House.¹⁵⁰

Arrangements regarding maternity, paternity, parental, adoption, and caring leave for Members are informal and operate at the party level.¹⁵¹ The 2010 report of the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation noted that:

Such arrangements as there are to support Members who have caring responsibilities are in the hands of the party whips (the business managers), who have to ensure sufficient Members are present in the House for decisions to be made, and arrange for their parties to be properly represented on all official groups and committees.¹⁵²

Voting in divisions

In the past Members, with young children, who wished to vote, had been "noddled through" the division lobbies. This procedure has been used by Members within the Parliamentary precincts who were not physically able to go through the division lobbies. These procedures are described by Erskine May:

If any Members who are disabled by infirmity from passing through the lobby are present on the parliamentary estate and wish to vote, their names are communicated by a Whip to the Clerks and to the tellers, and are included in the numbers counted.¹⁵³

In a footnote at the end of this extract, Erskine May indicates that "noddling through" was a practice of the House, not a rule.

However, practice has changed and the press has reported occasions when Members have carried babies through the division lobbies.¹⁵⁴ At its meeting on 28 March 2017, the Commons Reference Group on

¹⁵⁰ Under Standing Order No 45A, "The salary of a Member suspended from the service of the House shall be withheld for the duration of his suspension"

¹⁵¹ Sarah Childs, *The Good Parliament*, July 2016, p20

¹⁵² Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation), *Final Report*, 11 January 2010, HC 239-I 2009-10, para 257. The Speaker's Conference was appointed to "Consider, and make recommendations for rectifying, the disparity between the representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in the House of Commons and their representation in the UK population at large"

¹⁵³ Erskine May, *Parliamentary Practice*, 25th edition, 2019, [para 20.62](#)

¹⁵⁴ Mikey Smith, "[Labour MP posts adorable picture as he takes baby son to vote against Tory immigration bill](#)", *Mirror*, 15 October 2015 [on Jonathan Reynolds]; and Rosamund Urwin, "[Lib Dem MP makes history by bringing his baby into Commons for vote](#)", *Evening Standard*, 17 July 2014 [on Duncan Hames]

Representation and Inclusion¹⁵⁵ endorsed Mr Speaker's approach to allowing children up to the age of five in the Division Lobbies and into and through the Chamber whilst a vote was underway.¹⁵⁶

On 20 June 2018, Labour MPs complained that the "usual convention" of allowing seriously sick MPs to be nodded through the divisions lobbies was being broken.¹⁵⁷ At Business Questions, the following day, Andrea Leadsom told the House that "the first notice the Government were given was just before midday. [The Labour] party should have sorted out an arrangement in much better time" and that "communication clearly needs to improve, and that should be resolved privately".¹⁵⁸

6.2 The Good Parliament (2016) - recommendations

The Good Parliament report was prepared by Professor Sarah Childs following a secondment to the House of Commons. The Report offered "a 'menu' of practical solutions – 43 recommendations – to address the diversity insensitivities that remain in the UK House of Commons".¹⁵⁹

It recommended that the Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion should:

Produce a House Statement on maternity, paternity, parental, adoption and caring leave. All parties represented in the Commons would be expected to sign up to this.

In her report, Professor Childs noted that:

Arrangements regarding maternity, paternity, parental, adoption, and caring leave for Members are informal and operate at the party level. This no doubt results from the historic maleness of the House. Yet, to become a truly inclusive institution the House of Commons must accommodate and facilitate both the pregnant woman Member and co-parenting and caring MP.

She suggested three approaches to voting whilst MPs were on maternity, paternity, parental, adoption and caring leave:

For the period of leave, the MP might choose to:

- i. Vote remotely (i.e. off the Parliamentary Estate)
- ii. Appoint a proxy from amongst fellow party MPs to vote and otherwise act for them in respect of tabling questions, amendments, etc. in Parliament
- iii. Be formally and transparently 'paired' so that any absence from Parliament does not affect the balance of party representation in divisions.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion was established following the publication of Professor Sarah Childs' report, [The Good Parliament](#), July 2016

¹⁵⁶ Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion, [Decisions](#), November 2016 onwards

¹⁵⁷ [HC Deb 20 June 2018 c351](#); [HC Deb 21 June 2018 cc475-476](#)

¹⁵⁸ [HC Deb 21 June 2018 c477](#); BBC News, [Naz Shah's wheelchair vote prompts call for Commons reform](#), 21 June 2018

¹⁵⁹ Sarah Childs, [The Good Parliament](#), July 2016, p9

¹⁶⁰ Sarah Childs, [The Good Parliament](#), July 2016, pp20-21

Sarah Childs reported data from a 2011 Inter-Parliamentary Union report showing that maternity provision for MPs followed provisions in national law in 62% of parliaments. For paternity leave, the equivalent figure was 45% and for parental leave it was 39%.¹⁶¹

In August 2018, Professor Childs reviewed progress in implementing the report's recommendations. She argued that the breaking of a pair, earlier in the summer, had "demonstrated precisely why *The Good Parliament* report recommended a 'House statement on maternity and paternity leave'". She continued that:

This reform would end the reliance on the informal and opaque practice of pairing, which was always dependent upon the willingness of the Whips to grant leave and was always at the mercy of the pair behaving appropriately.

She thought that the pairing episode could help diversity sensitive reform at Westminster as "it highlights just how out of date some of the House's rules are and reveals the limitations of informal parliamentary practices that critics suggest render new formal rules unnecessary".¹⁶²

6.3 Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation (2010) – recommendations

The Speaker's Conference asked the whips of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties to outline the arrangements they had made to support parents and other carers. After hearing comments from them, the Speaker's Conference noted that "we believe that maternity, paternity and caring leave is an issue which all three main parliamentary parties have as yet failed to take fully seriously". And it recommended that:

Each Parliamentary party should draw up a formal statement of policy on maternity, paternity and caring leave. This should set out clearly the minimum level of support which an individual requesting leave may expect from his or her party, and the steps which the individual should take to arrange a period of leave. Such statements should be agreed by party leaders, and published on party websites and in the party whip, by the end of 2010.¹⁶³

The Speaker's Conference also considered the question of statutory maternity cover for MPs. The Conference noted that because MPs are held to be self-employed they are not entitled to statutory maternity cover. In addition, anyone "taking statutory maternity leave and claiming statutory maternity pay may not also work during the period of formal leave, except on ten days allowed for 'keeping in touch' and career development". This would cause difficulties if Members were required to attend the House of Commons to vote. The Conference

The Speaker's Conference was convened on 12 November 2008 to consider the disparity between the representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in the House of Commons and their representation in the UK population at large. It worked through 2009 collecting evidence and published its final report in January 2010.

¹⁶¹ Sarah Childs, *The Good Parliament*, July 2016, pp20-21, citing Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Gender Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice*, 2011,

¹⁶² Sarah Childs, "A Better, But Not as Yet, Good Parliament: The UK House of Commons 2016-2018", *PSA Parliaments Group Blog*, 16 August 2018

¹⁶³ Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation), *Final Report*, 11 January 2010, HC 239-I 2009-10, paras 263-264

invited the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), which is responsible for determining the salary of Members, to “consider the development of formal maternity, paternity and caring leave arrangements for MPs which are as closely equivalent to the general public sector provision as possible”.¹⁶⁴

In October 2017, it was reported that IPSA had given its backing to proposals for six months paid maternity leave for MPs, “in principle”.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Speaker’s Conference (on Parliamentary Representation), *Final Report*, 11 January 2010, HC 239-I 2009-10, paras 265-268

¹⁶⁵ Richard Vaughan, “[MPs may be given six months maternity leave to promote more women entering politics](#)”, *i Newspaper*, 18 October 2017

7. Extending the proxy voting arrangements during the coronavirus pandemic

Arrangements were made for Members to vote remotely during late April and May 2020, while hybrid proceedings operated in the House of Commons. But from the beginning of June, the Government encouraged all Members to participate in proceedings in the House. On 2 June 2020, the House agreed that Members had to be on the Parliamentary estate to participate in divisions.¹⁶⁶ Initially no provisions were made for MPs who were shielding, isolating or caring for someone else as a result of the coronavirus pandemic to participate in proceedings from 2 June.

Disquiet was expressed about these provisions and the Leader of the House said that he had not ruled out extending proxy voting to those who were shielding.¹⁶⁷

At Prime Minister's Questions on 3 June 2020, the Prime Minister was asked about MPs not being able to vote in the previous day's proceedings because of coronavirus restrictions. He said that it was not unreasonable to expect MPs to be in Westminster and continued, "I apologise to colleagues for the inconvenience. I apologise to all those who have particular difficulties with it because they are shielded or because they are elderly, and it is vital that, through the change we are making today, they should be able to vote by proxy".¹⁶⁸ A motion to allow proxy votes to certain Members affected by coronavirus restrictions themselves was tabled that evening.

On 4 June 2020, the House agreed to a Government proposal that proxy voting should be available to Members who were "at high risk from coronavirus for reasons that they are either 'clinically extremely vulnerable' or 'clinically vulnerable'".¹⁶⁹ A different group of Members, those who had "self-certified that they are unable to attend at Westminster for medical or public health reasons related to the pandemic" were allowed to "participate in proceedings on Questions, Urgent Questions and Statements virtually, by electronic means approved by the Speaker", until 7 July 2020.¹⁷⁰

Members had expressed concern that this did not go far enough and an Emergency Debate, granted on 4 June,¹⁷¹ was held on 8 June 2020.¹⁷² In that debate, the Leader of the House confirmed that the Government was "giving thought to bringing forward a motion that extends proxy voting

¹⁶⁶ [HC Deb 2 June 2020 cc725-760](#)

¹⁶⁷ [HC Deb 2 June 2020 cc733-734](#)

¹⁶⁸ [HC Deb 3 June 2020 c839](#)

¹⁶⁹ [HC Deb 4 June 2020 c1103](#)

¹⁷⁰ [HC Deb 4 June 2020 c1102](#)

¹⁷¹ [HC Deb 4 June 2020 cc1058-1059](#)

¹⁷² [HC Deb 8 June 2020 cc59-94](#)

beyond what has already been agreed by the House, to include Members who are more widely affected by the pandemic".¹⁷³

On 10 June, the House altered the eligibility for proxy votes to those Members who were "unable to attend at Westminster for medical or public health reasons related to the pandemic".¹⁷⁴

On 11 June 2020, the Speaker issued 135 certificates to Members under the Proxy Voting (Medical or public health reasons related to the pandemic provisions). The Votes and proceedings recorded that:

The Speaker has certified, under the terms of the temporary Standing Order on voting by proxy and the Resolutions of the House of 28 January 2019, 16 January, and 4 and 10 June 2020, that the Members listed in the table below are eligible to have a proxy vote cast on their behalf by the nominated proxies listed in the table below, starting on Monday 15 June and finishing on Tuesday 28 July.¹⁷⁵

On 16 June 2020, the Speaker made a short statement on the new division procedure and proxy voting on health grounds because of the pandemic. On proxy voting, he said:

I remind colleagues that the expanded proxy voting scheme applies to Members who are unable to attend Westminster for medical or public health reasons relating to the pandemic. If an hon. Member applies for a proxy vote, this means that they have given me and the House a commitment that they are not able to attend Westminster. It is therefore important that colleagues with proxies do not take part in any physical proceedings or come on to the Estate while they have a proxy vote in operation.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ [HC Deb 8 June 2020 c74](#)

¹⁷⁴ [HC Deb 10 June 2020 c361](#)

¹⁷⁵ House of Commons, *Votes and Proceedings*, 11 June 2020

¹⁷⁶ [HC Deb 16 June 2020 c645](#)

Appendix – Speaker’s Certificates - Proxy Voting for Parental Absence

Speaker’s certificates are reported in the *Votes and Proceedings*. The first two issued are quoted in full, below.

Details of all certificates issued under the pilot scheme (for parental absence) are reported in an Excel spreadsheet: [Proxy voting for Parental Absence: Speaker’s certificates issued](#).¹⁷⁷ Despite the rule changes to allow certification for medical or public health reasons related to the pandemic, in June 2020, the Appendix only reports certificates relating to parental absence. (A total of 135 pandemic-related certificates were reported on 11 June 2020.)

First certificates issued under the pilot Proxy Voting Scheme

Tulip Siddiq –

Issued 28 January 2019 covering 17 January to 16 July 2019

The Speaker has certified, under the terms of the temporary Standing Order on voting by proxy for parental absence and the Resolution of the House of 28 January, that Tulip Siddiq is eligible to have a proxy vote cast on her behalf, starting from Thursday 17 January 2019 and finishing on Tuesday 16 July 2019. The nominated proxy is Vicky Foxcroft.¹⁷⁸

Holly Lynch

Issued 29 January 2019 covering 30 January to 20 March 2019

The Speaker has certified, under the terms of the temporary Standing Order on voting by proxy for parental absence and the Resolution of the House of 28 January, that Holly Lynch is eligible to have a proxy vote cast on her behalf, starting from 30 January 2019 and finishing on 20 March 2019. The nominated proxy is Mark Tami.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ This spreadsheet is available on the briefing paper’s homepage: [Proxy voting in divisions in the House](#), CBP 8359

¹⁷⁸ House of Commons, [Votes and Proceedings](#), 28 January 2019

¹⁷⁹ House of Commons, [Votes and Proceedings](#), 29 January 2019

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