



## In Focus

### House of Lords Bill [HL] (HL Bill 15 of 2016–17)

#### Key Provisions

The [House of Lords Bill \[HL\]](#) is a private member's bill introduced by Lord Elton (Conservative). The Bill had its first reading in the House of Lords on 25 May 2016 and is scheduled to receive its second reading on 21 October 2016. The Bill would set the number of Lords Temporal—those Members of the House of Lords other than the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England, who serve as Lords Spiritual—to a specified number equal to the number of constituencies returning a Member to the House of Commons at the previous general election. Any change in order to set this number would take place at the end of the first session of a Parliament. Lord Elton explained the Bill's intentions in his [Explanatory Notes](#) to the Bill:

The Bill aims to reduce the number of Peers who are Members of the House of Lords to a specified maximum number no greater than the number of Members of the House of Commons. The reduction would take place at the end of the first session after enactment, and at the end of the first session of every subsequent Parliament. The Prime Minister's power to appoint Members of the House of Lords would continue. The size of the House could therefore increase during a Parliament, but would be reduced to the specified maximum number at the end of the first session of the next Parliament, and every subsequent Parliament.

The Bill would provide that the holder of a peerage would not be entitled to membership of the House of Lords after the first session of the Parliament following the one in which the holder first received a writ of summons unless the holder was excepted from this provision. The Bill would allow the House, through Standing Orders, to elect Peers to be so excepted, and therefore entitled to membership of the House.<sup>1</sup>

Provisions in the Bill would be implemented by a new Standing Order, which would be required to be proposed and accepted by the House should the Bill be enacted in its current form. Lord Elton has included a draft new Standing Order in his Explanatory Notes to the Bill (see pages 2–3).

Lord Elton has further described the Bill's intentions as follows:

This Bill is a response to two pressures: the need to contain the cost and increase the efficiency of the work of this House, and public disillusionment, developing into anger, with the conduct and structure of Parliament as a whole. Reform is seen as a remedy. But reform requires consensus. Only on one issue is there a degree of consensus, the size of the revising Chamber. The Bill addresses this issue alone. It aims to reduce our membership of this House to a number no greater than that of the House of Commons. The Prime Minister's power to appoint new Members would remain. The reduction would be by means of elections held at the end of the first session of every Parliament. They would be within the recognised affiliation groups, as was

done when the hereditary membership was reduced in 1999. The allocation of places would give each group the same proportion of the new membership as it had of the membership immediately before that election.<sup>2</sup>

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## Background

The Conservative Party manifesto published ahead of the 2015 general election stated that a Conservative Government would “ensure the House of Lords continues to work well by addressing issues such as the size of the Chamber and the retirement of Peers”.<sup>3</sup> During a recent debate relating to the House of Lords, Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen, speaking on behalf of the Government, stated: “We are not taking forward reforms during this Parliament. However [...] the new Leader [Baroness Evans of Bowes Park] looks forward to working with Peers to support incremental reform that commands consensus across the House”.<sup>4</sup>

As at 11 October 2016, the total membership of the House of Lords was 846—comprising 26 Bishops, 728 life Peers (17 appointed under the Appellate Jurisdiction Act 1876 and 711 under the Life Peerages Act 1958) and 92 hereditary Peers (who sit by virtue of provisions in the House of Lords Act 1999). The number of Members eligible to attend the House on this date was 812. This latter figure excludes the 25 Members on leave of absence, eight disqualified as senior members of the judiciary and one suspended from the service of the House as at 11 October.<sup>5</sup>

There are currently 650 UK parliamentary constituencies which return a Member to the House of Commons. The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 provided for a reduction in the number of UK parliamentary constituencies to 600. Boundary reviews to accommodate this change are currently underway in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.<sup>6</sup>

The House of Lords has held a number of debates on the size of the House in recent years. The Lords Library briefing [Size of the House of Lords](#) (29 January 2016) includes summaries of these debates, together with information on observations on the size of the House (see in particular pages 7–20).

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## Further Information

- House of Lords Library, [History of the House of Lords: A Brief Introduction](#), 12 February 2016
  - House of Lords Library, [Life Peerages Created Since 1958](#), 5 August 2016
  - House of Lords Library, [House of Lords: Statistical Profile of Membership](#), 23 March 2016
  - House of Lords Library, [Peerage Creations: Appointments to the House of Lords since 1997](#), 3 February 2016
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<sup>1</sup> [Explanatory Notes](#), 25 May 2016, p 1.

<sup>2</sup> This text was provided by Lord Elton on request from the Library.

<sup>3</sup> Conservative Party, [Conservative Party Manifesto 2015](#), April 2015, p 49.

<sup>4</sup> [HL Hansard, 9 September 2016, col 1251](#).

<sup>5</sup> House of Lords Journal Office.

<sup>6</sup> For further information see House of Commons Library, [Constituency Boundary Reviews and the Number of MPs](#), 25 February 2016; and [Parliamentary Boundary Reviews: Public Consultations](#), 13 September 2016.

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Any comments on In Focus should be sent to the Head of Research Services, House of Lords Library, London, SW1A 0PW or emailed to [purvism@parliament.uk](mailto:purvism@parliament.uk).