



BRIEFING PAPER

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Honours: History and reviews

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Summary

Most honours awarded today are part of the Order of the British Empire, which was established in 1917. Honours are awarded by the sovereign, with advice from committees of experts and senior Government minister. Any member of the public can now nominate someone for an honour. Almost from the beginning of the modern system, there was controversy about who should receive honours and suggestions of impropriety, particularly in the award of honours for political service.

Revival of political honours

This briefing provides an introduction to the various types of honours. It sets out the recent revival of the award of honours for parliamentary and political service, under David Cameron as Prime Minister in 2012, with the establishment of the Parliamentary and Political Service Committee. It also highlights the option of awarding honours on resignation taken by some Prime Ministers. This had not been the practice for a number of years, but resignation honours were awarded by David Cameron in August 2016, the first instance since John Major's resignation in 1997. Reaction to this is highlighted (section 2).

Removal of an honour: Forfeiture

It is possible to remove an honour once awarded, if the recipient is found to have brought the honours system into disrepute. This process is known as forfeiture. In 2016 there have been calls for forfeiture, including as part of a motion in the Commons on 20 October 2016. This is the first time the House has directly voted to call on the Forfeiture Committee to remove a knighthood. More information is given on the debate and on previous decisions on forfeiture (section 3).

Reviews of the honours system

The current system of honours has been subject to review a number of times since it was established in 1917. These have included a Royal Commission; reviews carried out in private by civil servants; in public by Select Committees and investigations by the police. The changes that have arisen from these reviews have mainly been designed to broaden the range of recipients and to boost public confidence in the integrity of the system. This included the introduction of a system of nomination made by the public, first introduced in 1993. The modern system, with public nomination, has developed so that in the New Year's Honours 2017, 74% of the recipients were people who have undertaken outstanding work in their communities either in a voluntary or paid capacity. A timeline is included of these reviews, including some suggestions for change which were made, but not carried out (section 4).

Further information on the processes for nomination of someone and for the award of an honour can be found in Library Briefing paper [Constituency Casework: Honours](#), CBP 7627.

The paper does not cover the process of nomination for peerages and membership of the House of Lords, as a life peer or political party 'working peer'. Further information on appointments to the House of Lords can be found in Library Briefing [Paper Peerage creations since 1997](#), CBP 5867, 3 February 2016.

1. The modern honours system

1.1 Honours: an introduction

Most honours awarded in the current system are part of the Order of the British Empire. Formally speaking it is one of the orders of chivalry, some of which date back to the middle ages. The Order of the British Empire was founded by King George V in 1917, as a way to recognise the service, voluntary and otherwise, delivered by non-combatants in connection with the First World War. In 1918 the Order was split into civil and military divisions.

Honours are awarded by the Queen, the majority are on recommendations from the Prime Minister. The Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary also submit lists of recommendations. These recommendations arise from nominations, made by organisations or members of the general public, familiar with the work of the candidate. Who gets an honour, and the honour they get, is decided by one of a number of subject based honours committees. These committees advise the Prime Minister.

A number of other honours, including the Order of Merit and those in the Royal Victorian Order, which applies to the Royal Household, are in the personal gift of the Queen.

The official government guidance on what people get honours for is:

People get honours for achievements like:

- making a difference to their community or field of work
- enhancing Britain's reputation
- long-term voluntary service
- innovation and entrepreneurship
- changing things, with an emphasis on achievement
- improving life for people less able to help themselves
- displaying moral courage

Honours are given to people involved in fields including:

- community, voluntary and local services
- arts and media
- health
- sport
- education
- science and technology
- business and the economy
- civil or political service¹

¹ GOV.UK, [The honours system](#), accessed 12 July 2016.

5 Honours

The different types of honour, with an indication of who receives them, and the Committees which make awards, are detailed on the official website, *GOV.UK*, [*Types of honours and awards*](#).

Any member of the public can nominate someone for an honour and can provide supporting evidence of the activities which generate the nomination. Library Briefing paper [*Constituency Casework: Honours*](#), CBP 7627, gives an indication of the process of awarding an honour and some of the questions about this most frequently put to Members of Parliament.

2. Types of honour

2.1 Political honours: a brief history

The civil or political service category, has always been one which attracted particular attention and controversy. Almost as soon as the Order of the British Empire was established in 1917 there was concern about instances of impropriety and the possible award of honours in return for payment to a political party, under the Premiership of Lloyd George. A Royal Commission looked into the matter in 1922 and in 1925 the first piece of legislation dealing with modern honours was enacted. The *Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act 1925* made it a criminal offence to deal in honours, as a broker or purchaser.

Political honours: 1966-2005

In 1966 honours for purely party political services were discontinued by Prime Minister Harold Wilson.² This policy was reversed under the premierships of Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher. John Major continued the policy of awarding political honours.³ There were changes following a review of party funding by the Committee on Standards in Public Life under Lord Neill in 1998.⁴ The Committee recommended that an existing body, the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee, established in 1923, should scrutinise every case where a nominee for an honour of CBE and above had directly or indirectly donated £5,000 or more to a political party at any time in the preceding five years. In 2005 this scrutiny role of nominations for political honours was taken over by the House of Lords Appointments Commission.

Political honours: Criminal investigation 2005-2006

In March 2006 the Metropolitan Police announced that they were to conduct an inquiry into allegations that offences had been committed under the *Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act*. This followed on from the House of Lords Appointments Commission blocking the appointment of three nominees, because loans made to the parties had not been disclosed to the Commission. Allegations that an offence had been committed were made by Plaid Cymru and Scottish National Party. An extensive criminal investigation was launched and senior politicians were interviewed, including Michael Howard, former leader of the Conservative Party, Lord Rennard, the Liberal Democrats' Chief Executive, and then Prime Minister Tony Blair.⁵ The 'cash for honours investigation' received intense media interest but despite several arrests did not result in any prosecutions.⁶

Although the main focus of the so-called 'cash for honours' affair and police investigation related to peerages, Tony Blair, the then Prime

² HC Deb 27 October 1966 vol 734 cc1301-5.

³ HC Deb 4 March 1993 vol 220 cc453-63

⁴ Cm 4057 October 1998

⁵ 'Blair Questioned by police over loans for peerages', *Times*, 15 December 2006; 'Howard questioned by police', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 October 2006; 'Detectives interview Lib Dem chief over £2.4m party donation', *Times*, 21 November 2006

⁶ See [Loans to Political Parties](#), Commons Library Standard Note 3960, 27 February 2007

Minister, announced on 23 March 2006 that he would no longer make any additions or subtractions from the list of names produced by the independent Honours Committees. However, he would continue to make recommendations for working peers.⁷

In an interview with the BBC's *Politics Show*, Tony Blair drew a distinction between party nominees as working peers and honours. He said that no one in the Labour Party had sold honours or peerages. He also commented that:

there are places in the House of Lords that are reserved for party nominees for their party supporters [...] these are not honours, they are working peerages reserved for party supporters, Conservative supporters, Labour supporters, Liberal Democrat supporters. In my view, it is absurd to say that if someone supports a political party financially – helps it pay its bills, run its election campaign – that they should be debarred from...those places reserved specifically for party supporters.⁸

Gordon Brown continued the practice of only nominating working peers, not other political service honours, as Prime Minister.

2.2 Parliamentary and Political Service Honours Committee (2012)

When David Cameron became Prime Minister in May 2010, there were indications of a new approach to political honours, when a number of MPs received awards for public and political services. On 17 May 2012, the Prime Minister announced that he had established a new honours committee, the Parliamentary and Political Service Honours Committee, to recognise political service.⁹

Box 1: Parliamentary and Political Service Honours Committee

The Parliamentary and Political Service Honours Committee has seven members. There are four independent members and an independent Chair. The Chief Whips of the Government and the official opposition parties in the Commons also serve as official members. The membership in 2016 was:

Independent chair:

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Spicer – Member, House of Lords (independent chair)

Independent members:

Dianne Bevan – Chief Operating Officer, National Assembly for Wales

The Rt Hon the Lord Butler of Brockwell KG GCB CVO - Member, House of Lords

The Rt Hon the Baroness Hayman GBE – former Speaker of the House of Lords

The Lord Lisvane KCB DL- former Clerk of the House of Commons

Official members:

⁷ [HC Deb, 23 March 2006, c34WS](#)

⁸ PM claims that no-one in his party sold honours, *Independent*, 17 July 2006.

⁹ [HC Deb, 17 May 2012, c43WS](#)

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP – Government Chief Whip

Rt Hon Nick Brown MP – Labour Chief Whip

The establishment of this new Committee brought the Prime Minister into conflict with the Commons Public Administration Select Committee, which regretted the establishment of the committee without discussion in Parliament.¹⁰ The Select Committee also recommended that there should not be a set allocation of honours for political service and that the whole honours system should be much more independent of Government and the process more open to the public. The Government rejected these recommendations and continues to nominate MPs and others for honours for political service, for instance four knighthoods were awarded in the 2016 Birthday Honours.¹¹

This continues to be a controversial part of the honours system, with some public suspicion that it is possible to gain an honour by support of or donation to a political party. Issue of the 2016 Birthday Honours list in June, also attracted some comment that honours had been used to reward supporters of the campaign to remain in the EU, in the run up to the Referendum on 23 June 2016. This claim was rejected by Downing Street, which asserted that the list of nominees had been finalised before the referendum was announced.¹²

Another issue of contention has been the view that MPs and others professionally involved in politics can be awarded an honour for “just doing the day job”. This suggestion was refuted in June 2016 by Sir Jonathan Stephens, Permanent Secretary to the Northern Ireland Office and Chair of the Main Honours Committee, who stated there had been a “conscious decision by successive committees and prime ministers” to reduce the number of civil servants receiving honours.

2.3 Resignation Honours

On 13 July 2016 David Cameron resigned as Prime Minister. On 4 August 2016 a resignation honours list was announced.¹³ This followed several weeks of speculation in the press.¹⁴

When making his announcement about the revival of honours for political and service in 2012, David Cameron stated:

The previous Government had a policy of not recommending honours for political service, although some individuals were honoured for services to Parliament. The Government believe that there are many people in politics

¹⁰ Public Administration Committee, *The Honours System*, 31 August 2012, HC19 2012-13, para 84.

¹¹ Press release, *The Queen's Birthday Honours 2016*, 10 June 2016, GOV.UK

¹² Cameron ‘used honours to reward Remain supporters’ *Times*, 11 June 2016.

¹³ Cabinet Office, *Resignation Honours 2016*, 4 August 2016.

¹⁴ [Whitehall blocks David Cameron's “cronies” honours list over ethical concerns](#), *Daily Telegraph*, 22 July 2016.

who demonstrate selfless commitment for the good of the nation and that it is right to recognise the best of them.¹⁵

The David Cameron resignation honours list in August 2016, was the first time an outgoing Prime Minister issued a list, specifically on resignation, since John Major in 1997. Since 1963, only four retiring Prime Ministers have issued resignation honours lists.¹⁶

On 31 July 2016 the *Sunday Times* published what it claimed was a leaked list of 48 “remain campaigners, donors and aides” to be included on David Cameron’s resignation honours list. At the beginning of August 2016 the BBC quoted a Number 10 Downing Street spokesman as stating that Prime Minister, Theresa May, would not interfere with David Cameron’s list as “this would set a bad precedent”. The spokesman confirmed that nominations would go through all the proper processes.¹⁷

The Resignation Honours List put forward by David Cameron would have been considered by the Parliamentary and Political Service Honours Committee and the Main Honours Committee, before being passed by the incoming Prime Minister, Theresa May, to the Queen.

Resignation honours by Prime Minister

Honour	David Cameron	John Major	Margaret Thatcher
	(4 August 2016) ^[1]	(2 August 1997) ^[2]	(21 December 1990) ^[3]
Life Peerage	13	10	7
Knights	4	8	8
Dames	2	0	2
Companion of Honour	1	1	0
Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG)	1	3	1
Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG)	0	1	0
Companion of the Bath	1	0	0
CBE	10	4	6
OBE	10	9	3
MBE	16	14 (one military)	8
BEM	0	0	7
Total	58	50	42

Notes:

^[1] Cabinet Office, *Resignation Honours 2016*, 4 August 2016.

^[2] *London Gazette, Supplement*, Number 54850, 1 August 1997.

^[3] *London Gazette, Supplement*, Number 52371, 20 December 1990.

With the David Cameron list, one nomination was also made for a peerage by the Leader of the Labour Party and two Crossbench Peers were created. Further details on numbers of Peers can be found in a Lords Library *In Focus* briefing.¹⁸

¹⁵ HC Deb 17 May 2012 cc42-43WS

¹⁶ [Resignation Honours: Peerage creations since 1958](#), Lords Library: In Focus, 12 July 2016.

¹⁷ [Theresa May ‘won’t intervene’ in David Cameron’s honours list](#), BBC News, 1 August 2016.

¹⁸ [Life Peerages created since 1958](#), Lords Library In Focus, 2016/0040, 5 August 2016.

With the John Major list, nominations for working Life Peerages were also made by the Party leaders by William Hague, Conservative (5), Tony Blair, Labour (31) and Paddy Ashdown Liberal Democrat (11).¹⁹

On certain occasions combined resignation and dissolution honours lists have been published following general elections. Gordon Brown issued a list on leaving office on 28 May 2010. The press noticed accompanying this stated:

The previous Prime Minister (the Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP) undertook a process to recommend to the Queen new party-political life peerages. This consisted of working peers from each party and, as is customary at the end of a Parliament, a dissolution list for former MPs.²⁰

The combined list contained 55 names of which the “Working Peers List” had 32 names, comprising 10 Conservatives, 6 Liberal Democrats and 16 Labour. An assumption could be made that the 16 Labour nominations constituted Gordon Brown’s resignation honours.

2.4 Comment on the David Cameron honours

Prior to issue of the Cameron list it was reported that donors to the Conservative Party and to the campaigns in the Scottish independence referendum, 2014, and the EU referendum, 2016, would be included. This led to calls for reform of the resignation honours process by the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. Labour Deputy Leader, Tom Watson, stated that he would like to abolish resignation honours. The Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, stated:

I do not believe in honours for politicians who are in office because I believe to be in office, to be elected, to be in Parliament, to account to everyone else, is honour itself.²¹

Once the list was published, there was press comment that at least three of those included in David Cameron’s list had made donations to the Conservative Party, including two former Party treasurers. This fact would have been considered by the Honours Committee when reviewing nominations. The press reported that a nomination for a peerage for former Conservative Party treasurer, Michael Spencer, had been turned down by the Honours Committee. It was also reported that another donor, Ian Taylor, had asked for his name to be withdrawn from nomination.²²

The discussions and recommendations of the Honours Committee are confidential and it makes no comment on the vetting of individuals.

Comment on the content of the resignation honours focused mainly on the creation of the Life Peers. The Chair of the Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee issued a press notice on 9 August 2016, stating that this was the most important issue arising and indicating that the Committee hoped to consider the way

¹⁹ [London Gazette, Supplement, Number 54851, 1 August 1997.](#)

²⁰ [Peerages, honours and appointments](#), Press Notice, 10 Downing Street, 28 May 2010

²¹ *ibid*

²² [Former PM David Cameron facing MPs’ inquiry...](#) *Daily Telegraph* website, 4 August 2016.

new peers were appointed in Autumn 2016.²³ The Chief Executive of the Electoral Reform Society expressed disappointment at the creation of peerages and described this as a “sorry legacy”.²⁴

Other press comment related to the award of honours, including knighthoods, to staff who had worked with David Cameron within Downing Street and as political advisers. Press reports suggested that because of the controversy, this right should not be exercised by future Prime Ministers.²⁵

The Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Tom Watson, wrote to Prime Minister, Teresa May, in early August 2016, asking for her proposals to restrict future resignation honours and offering opposition co-operation in achieving this.²⁶ Tom Watson also stated that he had written to the Head of the Civil Service, to request an inquiry into the apparent leak of the honours list while it was still under consideration.²⁷ It was widely reported later in August that a leak inquiry was under way, but no official confirmation was given.²⁸

2.5 Critique of Labour Party nomination (2016)

Criticism was also made of the Labour Party for their nomination of a peerage for Shami Chakrabarti, as part of the David Cameron resignation honours list, in August 2016. Shami Chakrabarti was the former head of campaign group Liberty and the author of a report to the Labour leader on alleged antisemitism within the Labour Party, in June 2016.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews issued a press statement that they felt this was an unfortunate award.²⁹

Some Labour MPs felt that the Party’s criticism of resignation honours had been undermined by the nomination. A spokesman for Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Leader, issued a statement:

Shami Chakrabarti shares Jeremy’s ambition for reform of the House of Lords. Her career has been one of public service and human rights advocacy.

Her legal and campaigning skills, and the trust that she has gained from many ordinary Britons, will be a considerable asset to the House of Lords.³⁰

²³ [Chair to invite PACAC to look at PM Honours List](#), 9 August 2016.

²⁴ Electoral Reform Society, Press release, [Cameron’s Lords appointments are a sorry legacy](#), 4 August 2016.

²⁵ [Strip Prime Ministers of right to give honours](#), Daily Telegraph, 6 August 2016.

²⁶ Labour Party, Press Notice, [Tom Watson on reports that Teresa May will abolish resignation honours](#), 7 August 2016.

²⁷ Ibid Labour Party.

²⁸ [Inquiry launched to find out who leaked David Cameron’s resignation honours list](#), Daily Mail, 23 August 2016.

²⁹ British Jews, Press release, [Statement on Shami Chakrabarti’s peerage](#), 4 August 2016.

³⁰ [Corbyn’s offer of peerage to Shami Chakrabarti causes Labour tensions](#), Guardian, 4 August 2016.

3. Removal of an honour

An honour can be removed if the conduct of the holder makes them considered unworthy to retain it. There is a set process for removal of an honour, after it has been awarded. The Sovereign may, on the advice of Ministers, cancel an award. This is known as forfeiture. The object of forfeiture is to preserve the integrity of the honours system.

There is a Forfeiture Committee which makes a recommendation to The Queen, through the Prime Minister. Their discussions are confidential. If an honour is forfeited, this is published in the *London Gazette*.

The Gov.uk website states that someone's honour can be taken away if they are:

- sentenced to prison for at least 3 months for a criminal offence
- censured or struck off by a professional or regulatory body for something directly relevant to their honour (eg a doctor being struck off).

Other reasons for forfeiture can also be considered. The overall criterion is whether the honours system has been brought into disrepute.

In December 1994 the then Prime Minister, John Major, gave this information on when a removal might take place:

The statutes of most orders of knighthood and the royal warrants of decorations and medals include provision for the Queen to "cancel and annul" appointments and awards. Cancellation is considered in cases where retention of the appointment or award would bring the honours system into disrepute. There are no set guidelines for cancellations, which are considered on a case-by-case basis.³¹

In answer to a PQ asking for criteria of removal, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Matthew Hancock gave this statement on 6 June 2016:

The Forfeiture Committee which makes recommendations on the removal of honours can consider any case where there is evidence to suggest that the retention of an honour would bring the honours system into disrepute, for example, if an individual has been found guilty by the Courts of a criminal offence and sentenced to a term of imprisonment; or has been censured/struck off by the relevant Regulatory Authority or Professional Body for actions or failures to act which are directly relevant to the granting of the Honour.³²

3.1 Sir Philip Green (2016)

In 2016, the issue of removal of an honour became particularly topical, in relation to Sir Philip Green, previous Chairman of BHS. On 20 October

³¹ [HC Deb 2 December 1994](#), vol 250, c923W.

³² PQ 38694 [on Honours], 6 June 2016

2016, the House of Commons held a backbench business debate on the collapse of the retail group BHS and its pension scheme.³³

The motion for debate included an amendment calling for the removal of the knighthood of the former Chairman of the company, Sir Philip Green. It is believed that this is the first time the Commons has passed a motion specifically calling on the Honours Forfeiture Committee to remove an honour.

BHS (formerly British Home Stores) went into receivership in 2016, with threats to the jobs of some 11,000 employees. There were also pension fund liabilities for existing staff and pensioners.

The company had been in the ownership of Sir Philip Green 2000-2015, when it was sold to an investor for £1.00. Sir Philip was awarded a knighthood in 2006 for 'services to the retail industry'.³⁴

The debate on 20 October 2016 was on a motion to take note of the joint report by Commons Select Committees on Business, Innovation and Skills and Work and Pensions. The report of the Select Committees on [BHS](#) was published on 25 July 2016.³⁵ An amendment to the motion for the debate was added at the end to state:

and, noting that Philip Green received his knighthood for his services for the retail industry, believes his actions raise the question of whether he should be allowed to continue to be a holder of the honour and calls on the Honours Forfeiture Committee to strip him of his knighthood.³⁶

During the debate the amendment was moved by Richard Fuller, (Bedford). The amendment had been supported by 113 other members. In his speech Richard Fuller stated:

To some people, "honour" may seem an unusual word to use with regard to business, but in an effective business, ultimately, honour is all that one has. A person can amass a great fortune, but in such turbulent times for the market, they can lose it in a day, and all they are left with is their honour. Underpinning the amendment is the need to gauge, from the specifics of our parliamentary inquiry into British Home Stores, not whether Sir Philip Green's actions were legal but whether they were honourable. That is pertinent because he received his honour for services to retail.³⁷ [...]

He wound up his speech:

Colleagues in the House have spoken to me privately and said that they may well agree that Sir Philip Green is no longer deserving of the knighthood, but they are not sure that the House has a role to play in that. Respectfully, I disagree. We are here to assert a view on the opinion of the people, and I think it is perfectly valid that we should consider the issue in the context of our report. It is on our

³³ [HC Deb 20 October 2016, c981-1022](#)

³⁴ [London Gazette, Supplement 58014](#), 17 June 2006.

³⁵ Work and Pensions and Business Innovation and Skills Committees, *BHS*, 20 July 2016, HC54 2016-17.

³⁶ [HC Deb 20 October 2016, c981-1022](#)

³⁷ *Ibid*, col 987

work that we are expressing a view. We do not make the final decision, but it is worthy and honourable for this House to have a view about Sir Philip Green. Over the summer, Sir Philip has had the opportunity to find his moral compass and do the right thing. In the absence of that, the House has no option but to support the amendment and the motion.³⁸

Press reaction on the proceedings drew attention to some of the comments made in the debate.^{39 40} There was also feeling expressed that the whole process of removing an honour could involve “messy compromise”.⁴¹

Following the debate on 20 October 2016, Frank Field, the Chair of the Commons Work and Pensions Committee, wrote to the Forfeiture Committee to draw attention to the amended motion. On 17 January 2017 Sir Jonathan Stephens, the Chair of the Forfeiture Committee, replied and indicated that consideration of the matter by the Forfeiture Committee would await the outcome of the inquiries taking place into BHS by independent regulators.⁴² It is unusual for any information to be given on the progress of consideration by the Forfeiture Committee.

The issue was raised at Prime Minister’s Questions in the Commons on 1 February 2017, by David Winnick. In response Theresa May, the Prime Minister, stated:

The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. Many Members of this House have expressed concern about what happened at BHS and the attitude and approach taken by Philip Green. Whether a knighthood should be taken away from someone is a matter for the relevant committee—I have forgotten the name—which will be examining the case; I understand that it is waiting for the investigations to be completed. This is a matter for an independent committee and it is up to the committee how it looks into it.⁴³

3.2 Membership of the Forfeiture Committee

The Forfeiture Committee, which considers removal of honours, normally includes the Head of the Home Civil Service (Chair) and the Treasury Solicitor, with a majority of independent members. Other members of the Committee may vary, depending on cases being considered.

The membership was reviewed and amended in 2012, following the case of Fred Goodwin, who had a knighthood removed. In evidence submitted to the Public Administration Committee enquiry in 2012, Sir Bob Kerslake, the Head of the Home Civil Service stated:

³⁸ Ibid, col 988

³⁹ [MPs are right. This man should surrender his title](#). *The Independent*, 21 October 2016.

⁴⁰ [Not one MP spoke up for Phil the Spiv](#). *Daily Mail*, 21 October 2016.

⁴¹ [Removing honours is a messy process](#), *The Independent*, 20 October 2016.

⁴² [Letter to Chair regarding Sir Philip Green knighthood](#), HC Work & Pensions Committee, 24 January 2017.

⁴³ [HC Deb 1 February 2017, c1023](#).

The new Forfeiture Committee still includes the Head of the Civil Service and the Treasury Solicitor, but also has a majority of independent members: the Chair of the specialist Honours Committee which recommended the honour to be forfeited, and the chairs of two other specialist committees unrelated to the case or cases under consideration by the Forfeiture Committee.⁴⁴

In 2012 the House of Commons Public Administration Committee recommended that a more independent Forfeiture Committee should be established, chaired by an independent figure such as a retired high court judge. Also that its proceedings should be held in public. The government did not accept these recommendations:

[...] the Government does not favour further significant change to forfeiture policy and practice until the reforms introduced earlier this year have had a chance to bed down. These included introducing a majority of independent members; the use of additional under-pinning criteria; and a willingness to accept written representations. It does not believe that public show-trials which would serve to shame further the individuals concerned are appropriate to the dignity of the honours system.⁴⁵

Since 2015 the Forfeiture Committee has been chaired, under delegated authority from the Head of the Civil Service, by Sir Jonathan Stephens, the Permanent Secretary for the Northern Ireland Office.

3.3 Critiques of the forfeiture system

On 31 January 2012 the Forfeiture Committee made an unusual public statement noting that the knighthood conferred on Fred Goodwin, former Chief Executive Officer of the Royal Bank of Scotland, would be cancelled and annulled. Usually there is no direct announcement from the Forfeiture Committee and removals of honours are just notified in the *London Gazette*.

As well as the unusual statement, there was also comment made that the forfeiture of the knighthood did not meet previously defined criteria for such a decision. The press notice stated that the "scale and severity of the impact of his actions as CEO of RBS made this an exceptional case."⁴⁶ There have also been suggestions that the position of Goodwin was reviewed by the Forfeiture Committee in 2009, following an EDM signed by over 70 MPs.⁴⁷

A number of sources, including the Public Administration Select Committee, commented that the forfeiture of Fred Goodwin's knighthood had been irregular. This led them to recommend that there should be expanded and more open criteria for removal of an honour.

⁴⁴ Public Administration Select Committee, [The honours system](#), 17 July 2012, HC 19-I, 2010-12, Ev 50.

⁴⁵ Public Administration Select Committee, [The honours system: further report with Government response to the Committee](#), 23 November 2012, HC 728 2012-13, Appendix 1.

⁴⁶ Cabinet Office Press Release, [Goodwin Knighthood decision](#), 31 January 2012

⁴⁷ *Goodwin's honour was upheld in 2009. So what changed?* 2 February 2012 *Independent*

106. The media storm around Fred Goodwin's knighthood was one of the reasons why his case was considered by the Forfeiture Committee, and why the decision was made to cancel and annul his knighthood. Mr Goodwin's actions did not meet the previously defined criteria for forfeiture and calls for his knighthood to be stripped had been rejected by the previous Government. The fact that the criteria for forfeiture were so obscure and narrow was unfortunate. There should be a clear and expanded criteria for the forfeiture of an honour, one of which should be damage to the industry or sector that the individual was originally deemed to have served so exceptionally.⁴⁸

The Government did not accept these criticisms.⁴⁹

The Government does not accept the assertion that Mr Goodwin's actions did not meet the previously agreed criteria for forfeiture: the over-riding criterion has always been the one of "bringing the honours system into disrepute", and the evidence available to the Forfeiture Committee had changed since the case was considered under the previous Government.

The Government believes that this over-riding criterion is important and should be retained, but that the more specific criteria which underpin it should continue to be used and added to, drawing on the experience of the cases that come before the Committee.

There has also been other criticism that reasons for the removal of an honour are not made public by the Forfeiture Committee.

On 29 March 2007, Harry Cohen MP asked the Prime Minister, why the reason for was not included and got this response from Tony Blair:

Harry Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister why the reason for the removal of an honour from an individual is not routinely included with the notice of forfeiture placed in the *London Gazette*; if he will make it his policy that such reasons be so included; and if he will make a statement. [130486]

The Prime Minister: The Sovereign may, on the advice of Ministers, cancel an award if the holder is considered unworthy to retain it. It would be unnecessary to repeat this in the *London Gazette* on every occasion of forfeiture.⁵⁰

In 2009 the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, stated:

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what the names are of those whose honours have been cancelled by the Forfeiture Committee since 1997; and for what reasons each honour was cancelled; [271526]

(2) how many inquiries the Forfeiture Committee has undertaken following a complaint from (a) a member of the public, (b) a professional body or organisation and (c)

⁴⁸ Public Administration Select Committee, *The Honours System*,.....

⁴⁹ Public Administration Select Committee, [The honours system: further report with Government response to the Committee](#), 23 November 2012, HC 728 2012-13, Appendix 1.

⁵⁰ HC Deb 29 March 2007, col 1668W

an hon. Member since 1990; and how many of these inquiries were instigated at the Committee's own volition.

The Prime Minister: Notice of forfeiture is published in the *London Gazette*, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House. The details of why an individual forfeits an honour are confidential.⁵¹

Freedom of Information requests from members of the public for the records of the committee and names of those considered have also been rejected, on the grounds that this would not serve the public interest.⁵²

3.4 Historical examples of forfeiture

A recent historical overview of forfeiture concluded that the removal of knighthoods is comparatively rare:

Deprivations of knighthoods are rare. The most famous case is probably Roger Casement, knighted in 1911 for his services as a diplomat, and executed for treason in 1916. Joseph Kagan, knighted in 1970 and granted a life peerage in 1976, was stripped of his knighthood in 1980 after conviction for tax fraud, though, like Lord Spens, he could not be deprived of his peerage and continued to speak in the Lords until his death.⁵³

Since 1980 six knights and one dame have had notices of forfeiture listed in the *London Gazette*:

Name	Date awarded	Date removed	Notes
Joseph Kagan	1970	1980	Following conviction for tax fraud.
Isidore Jack Lyons	1967	1991	Following conviction for theft and false accounting
Jean Else	2000	2011	Barred from teaching by the General Teaching Council
Frederick Goodwin	2004	2012	RBS Chief Executive. "it was recognised that widespread concern about Fred Goodwin's decisions meant that the retention of a knighthood for 'services to banking' could not be sustained." ^[1]
James Robert Crosby	2006	2013	HBOS Chief Executive. He requested removal of his knighthood following report by Banking Commission.
Alan Seymour Davies	2000	2014	Following conviction for false accounting, as a head teacher.
George Castledine	2007	2015	Struck off by Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Source: House of Commons Library and the London Gazette

Notes:^[1] Goodwin knighthood decision, Cabinet Office Press Release, 31 January 2012.

⁵¹ [HC Deb 30 April 2009, col 1415W](#)

⁵² [What do they know.com website](#), records from 2009, accessed March 2016.

⁵³ Ann Lyon, '[Deprivations of Honours: a brief history](#)', History & Policy blog, 8 February 2012.

3.5 Removal from a person who has died

An honour, which conveys membership of an order of chivalry, can't be awarded to a person who has died. In the same way an honour can't be removed from a person who has died since receiving the honour.

The position was clarified by the Government in October 2012, in the context of child abuse legal cases.⁵⁴

In March 2015 this was confirmed when the Cabinet Office Minister, Lord Wallace of Saltaire stated:

It is possible to rescind an honour on the advice of the Forfeiture Committee and with the approval of the Sovereign. Forfeiture may be considered for holders of awards in civilian or military Orders of Knighthood and for those appointed Knight Bachelor. We cannot comment on whether or not specific cases are being considered for forfeiture. There is no posthumous forfeiture of honours.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ [Jimmy Savile cannot be stripped of knighthood](#), *Guardian*, 9 October 2012.

⁵⁵ [PQ HL5633 \[on honours\]](#), 11 March 2015

4. History and reviews: timeline

The current system of honours has been subject to review a number of times since it was established in 1917. These have included a Royal Commission; reviews carried out in private by civil servants; in public by Select Committees and investigations by the police. The following is a summary of these reviews, their recommendations and changes made to the honours system.

The overall impact of reviews and changes have mainly been to broaden the range of recipients of honours and to boost public confidence in the integrity of the system. The deliberations of the Honours Committees, and the advice they give to the Prime Minister and the Monarch, remain confidential. The process of making a nomination for a general honour, with the supporting evidence needed, has become much more open.

4.1 Royal Commission and outcomes (1922)

Almost as soon as the modern honours system was created in 1917 there was concern that award of an honour might be gained by payment to a political party. In October 1917 the House of Lords passed a resolution which included:

That the Prime Minister, before recommending any person for any such honour or dignity, should satisfy himself that no payment or expectation of payment to any Party or political fund is directly or indirectly associated with the grant or promise of such honour or dignity.⁵⁶

Widespread concern at the practice and an instance where a convicted fraudster was recommended for a peerage, caused a Royal Commission, under the chairmanship of Lord Dunedin, to be set up in September 1922. The Royal Commission reported in December 1922, having interviewed almost all living former Prime Ministers on their role in the system.⁵⁷

The Royal Commission found that in general the honours system had been operating with propriety, with the exception of those granted for political service. The Royal Commission recommended the creation of a Political Honours Scrutiny Committee, which was set up in 1923. The Committee's membership was limited to three members of the Privy Council, who could not be members of the Government.

The Political Honours Scrutiny Committee continued to operate until 2005, when the House of Lords Appointments Commission took over the role of vetting this type of awards. This had been a recommendation of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

The report of the 1922 Royal Commission also eventually led to the enactment of the *Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act 1925*, making it a criminal offence to deal in honours, either as a broker or a purchaser. There has been only one prosecution under this act, that of Maundy

⁵⁶ HL Deb 31 October 1917 vol 26 cc835-86

⁵⁷ *Report of the Royal Commission on Honours*, Cmd 1789, 22 December 1922.

Gregory in 1933. He was convicted of selling honours (peerages), fined and imprisoned.⁵⁸

4.2 Prime Minister Harold Wilson (1967)

Harold Wilson, as Prime Minister, undertook a review of the honours system, announcing that the proportion of awards made to civil servants would be reduced over a period.⁵⁹

4.3 Prime Minister John Major review (1992)

When John Major was Prime Minister, he launched a review in May 1992 with the intention of giving greater recognition for genuine merit. At the start of the review the press indicated that John Major wanted to review the system where civil servants and some military ranks received honours automatically.

A book published in 1991, had shown how awards appeared to be distributed disproportionately, although this was not specifically cited by John Major. A high proportion were being distributed to civil servants and to people falling within the definition of the 'establishment'.⁶⁰

However John Major did maintain the system of issue of a Dissolution Honours List following the 1992 General Election. This list included the award of a life peerage to Margaret Thatcher, his predecessor as Prime Minister.

In December 1990, the month after Margaret Thatcher's resignation as prime minister, it had been announced that her husband, Denis Thatcher, would be created a baronet (the first such creation since 1964). This was on the advice of John Major to the Queen. The baronetcy was a hereditary title that was to be inherited by their son Mark after Sir Denis's death. It was the first British baronetage to be granted since 1964, and no baronetages have been created thereafter. A related creation was the hereditary earldom of Stockton awarded to the former Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan in 1984. These are the only two hereditary titles created outside of the Royal Family since 1965.

John Major's review was followed by a statement on 4 March 1993. He proposed to:

- End the recommendation of honours where given solely by seniority or by appointment
- Increase the proportion given in respect of voluntary service
- Phase out the British Empire Medal in favour of the Order of the British Empire
- Bring forward the usual five-yearly cycle of the number and distribution of honours
- Making the nomination procedure more transparent.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Andrew Cook, *Cash for honours: the story of Maundy Gregory*, 2008.

⁵⁹ HC Deb 21 July 1967 c348-9w

⁶⁰ Michael De-la-Noy, *The honours system: who gets what and why*, 2nd ed, 1991.

⁶¹ HC Deb 4 March 1993 c 453-463

On 1 August 1997 John Major issued a resignation honours list, following his defeat in the 1997 General Election. This included the appointment of ten new Life Peers. Since 1963, only four retiring Prime Ministers have issued resignation honours lists.⁶²

4.4 Committee on Standards in Public Life (1998)

In 1998 the Committee on Standards in Public Life, at that time chaired by Lord Neill, undertook a study on the funding of political parties in the United Kingdom. As part of this study they looked into the history of potential abuse of the honours system in exchange for making donations to political parties.

Chapter 14 of their report, published in October 1998, gave a detailed account of the operation of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee and considered where the work of this Committee did not integrate well with other parts of the honours nomination system.

The report gave a summary of recent practice in the awarding of political honours:

The substantial majority of honours fall into the non-political category. Under recent Conservative governments, of the 1,000 or so names on the Prime Minister's lists for the New Year honours and for the Queen's official Birthday honours, only about 50 (the majority of which were for OBE or MBE) were for political services. According to the PHSC's evidence to the Committee, those 50 were mainly Conservative names, but they have included individuals suggested by the leaders of other Parties at the invitation of the Prime Minister (as contemplated in 1979 by the then Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, when she revived the practice of awarding honours for political services).

Labour Prime Ministers have not, since the 1960s, recommended people for honours for political services in the New Year and Birthday Honours lists, although Labour Members of Parliament and others do feature in Working Peer and Dissolution Honours lists (and occasionally, for non-Party services, in other lists).⁶³

Neither the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee nor the Neill Committee felt that nominees should be prevented from receiving an honour because they had made political donations. But the Committee on Standards in Public Life believed it important that the appearance of a link between donations and honours should be minimised.

Following the Committee on Standards in Public Life report, the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee was renamed the Scrutiny Honours Committee. It took on the role of vetting for propriety and checking

⁶² [Resignation Honours: Peerage creations since 1958](#), Lords Library: In Focus, 12 July 2016.

⁶³ Committee on Standards in Public Life [Fifth Report Funding of Political Parties](#) 1998 Cm 4057

whether political donations over £5,000 had been made in the last five years in:

- nominations by party leaders for public or political services
- nominations made personally by the Prime Minister (after the various nominating committees have submitted their lists
- awards at the Knight/Dame/Companion of Honour level

The Committee's role was advisory only. Where a Prime Minister rejected a decision of the Committee, it would contact the Crown directly.⁶⁴

4.5 Wilson Review (2000-01)

In 2000, a review was commissioned by the then Cabinet Secretary, Sir Richard Wilson and conducted mainly by senior officials.

The Cabinet Office Honours Review was an internal process and the papers written for it were not intended for publication. However the Cabinet Office did agree to release the majority of the work which had been carried out, in order to inform the House of Commons Public Administration inquiry in 2004. These papers are also available for consultation in the Commons Library collection.

Appendix B of this paper gave a breakdown of distribution of honours by sector in the period 1998-2000. The review noted however that there was one honour per 3,125 home civil servants, one honour per 123 for diplomats and one per 1,090 for armed forces.⁶⁵ In contrast, teachers received 1 per 15,500 and nurses 1 per 20,000 in the six lists from the New Year in 1998 to the Birthday Honours in 2000.⁶⁶ Another review document found that there was a clear correlation between the level of honour and the grade or rank of the recipient.⁶⁷

Details were given on how the nominations system had developed in the 1990s, since the Major reforms of 1993:

3. A dedicated Nominations Unit was set up [...]to develop a system based upon a standard nomination form, setting out the type of information needed. The intention was, as part of Mr Major's commitment to a classless society, to involve more 'ordinary' members of the public and thereby "help increase the recognition of merit of all kinds".

4. The initial launch and associated publicity secured a flood of forms to the Unit — some 10,000 in the first year. Eight years on, the Unit has 30,000 live nominations in its system with an average of 6,000 new nominations coming in annually (with a roughly equal number of unsuccessful nominations being taken off the list

⁶⁴ Oral evidence from Gay Catto, Ceremonial Branch, Cabinet Office 7 July 2003 to Public Administration Select Committee, Q259
<http://pubs1.tso.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmpubadm/642/3070707.htm>

⁶⁵ *ibid*, para 30

⁶⁶ *ibid* para 25

⁶⁷ *Honours: Criteria for Levels of Honours* Cabinet Office January 2001, paras 39-42

to keep it at a manageable level).⁶⁸ (About 46% of nominations are received from the public) [...]

9. The other 57% of candidates (54% in the New Year 2001 list) are identified by Departments through their own systems for generating names. Each Department has an honours secretary and the larger one have an honours unit which canvasses nominations from commands and divisions which in their turn seek nominations from the organisations the Department sponsors. The Department then combines its own names with public nominations (whether passed over to it by the central nomination unit or submitted to the Department direct). These are processed and moderated by a Departmental honours committee, usually chaired by the Permanent Secretary. The resulting 'Departmental list' is submitted to Ceremonial Branch which allocates the candidates amongst the appropriate honours selection sub-committees.

The review found that there had been a significant increase in the numbers of honours being awarded for voluntary work:

15. The Major review of 1993 concluded that there should be a significant increase in awards made to those doing voluntary work. In the birthday 1994 list, such awards made up a third of the Prime Minister's list. Two years later, in the Birthday 1996 list, this was up to 47%. It reached 50% in the New Year 1998 list. Since then, it has only once fallen below half, its highest point to date being 57% in the Birthday 1998 list. Awards for voluntary service are clustered at the MBE level.⁶⁹

4.6 Phillips Review (2004)

In 2004, there was interest in honours following the refusal of an OBE by the poet Benjamin Zephaniah, which he stated was because of the links of the Empire to slavery. The *Sunday Times* 14 December 2003 reported that the minutes of the Main Honours Committee had been leaked to it.⁷⁰ This included a reported decision not to award an honour to Professor Colin Blakemore, chief executive of the Medical Research Council, because of controversy caused by his involvement in animal experimentation.⁷¹ The *Sunday Times* 21 December 2003 carried another leak listing 300 people who had refused honours.⁷²

With the publication of the New Year's Honours on 1 January 2004, a Government spokeswoman was quoted as stating that a review of the system, designed to make it more independent and transparent, was under way.⁷³ The *Times* reported that Sir Hayden Phillips, Permanent Secretary of the Department for Cultural Affairs, was undertaking the review.⁷⁴

The Phillips report was published in July 2004 and offered suggestions on reform of the system. Hayden Phillis considered the creation of an independent Honours Commission, but did not favour this due to costs,

⁶⁸ *Honours: Nominations* 16 January 2001 Cabinet Office

⁶⁹ *Honours Oversight* January 2001 Cabinet Office

⁷⁰ *Sunday Times* 14 December 2003 'Whistleblower reveals secrets of honours list'

⁷¹ Professor Blakemore has given oral evidence to the Public Administration Select Committee on the matter. See the committee website for a transcript.

⁷² *Sunday Times* 21 December 2003 'Secret list of 300 who scorned honours'

⁷³ BBC News 31 December 2003 'Rugby heroes delighted by rugby honours'

⁷⁴ *Times* 31 December 2003 'System to be stripped of its mystique and secrecy'

loss of experience and the need still to involve government departments in consideration of nominations. In terms of the composition of the honours committees he recommended:

21. If the objective of change is to put into the system greater independence of leadership to reinforce confidence in the system while avoiding unnecessary extra cost, that could be achieved in an economic and evolutionary way by appointing independent chairs (whose names would be publicly known) to the range of advisory committees and ensuring that the committees themselves all contained a predominant independent majority. [...]

22. I suggest this approach is taken and then given a chance to be tested and evaluated over a three to five year period.[...]

23. It would be important for the continuity and authority of the system if the Permanent Secretaries of the relevant departments attended committees to explain departmental recommendations. The Main Honours Committee would thus be composed of independent members (the chairs of the sub-committees), but I would suggest it be chaired by the Cabinet Secretary or as now by his representative, and include the Permanent Under-Secretaries of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and of the Ministry of Defence. The three present lists would be moderated by the Main Committee for consistency, including, for the State list, across the Home Civil Service, the Diplomatic Service and the Defence Services.

This would enable the Main Committee to provide the right quality control of the three lists and ensure consistency between them.⁷⁵

4.7 PASC report and responses (2004)

The Commons Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) took evidence from Sir Hayden Phillips and Mrs Gay Catto, who headed the Ceremonial Secretariat in the Cabinet Office, on the operation of the honours system. It was part of a separate inquiry into the royal prerogative, but this led PASC to decide to carry out its own inquiry into honours.⁷⁶

The PASC chairman, Dr Tony Wright announced that the committee would launch an inquiry in January 2004 to examine the honours system.⁷⁷

The PASC report was published in July 2004, a few days before the Phillips report.

The PASC report summary called for radical changes, including the creation of an independent commission:

The Report expresses doubts about the way honours are distributed to state servants, including civil servants and members of the armed forces. It was felt that the continued use of the two Orders almost exclusively conferred on state servants—the Order of the Bath and the Order of St Michael and St George—

⁷⁵ *Review of the honours system* Cabinet Office July 2004 Dep 04/1463 available at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090118230434/http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/corp/assets/publications/reports/honours/honours.pdf>

⁷⁶ Uncorrected oral evidence, Q223

⁷⁷ *Times* 16 December 2003 'Call for end of empire in new-look honours'

suggested that they were receiving favourable treatment. Doubts about equity and fairness were deepened by the composition of the honours selection committees, which continue to be dominated by senior civil servants. The title "Order of the British Empire" was now considered to be unacceptable, being thought to embody values that are no longer shared by many of the country's population.

We make a series of recommendations which we believe are necessary to ensure that the honours system is consistent with the principles of sound public administration. These include: an end to further appointments to the Order of the British Empire, the Order of the Bath and the Order of St Michael and St George; the foundation of a new Order of British Excellence; a phasing out of titles and name-changing honours; reforms to increase the independence of the selection process through the establishment of an Honours Commission and the end of the 'Prime Minister's List' and other ministerial honours lists; and proposals for increasing public awareness of the system.⁷⁸

Both the Phillips Review and the PASC report both supported greater transparency in the awarding of honours and more involvement by non-civil servants.

Box 2: House of Lords Appointments Commission

The House of Lords Appointments Commission was established in 2000 as a Non-Departmental Public Body, following the expulsion of all but 92 hereditary peers from the Lords. Its initial role was:

- to recommend people as non-party political life peers;
- to vet all nominations for membership of the House of Lords

In 2005 the Commission was also given the responsibility to scrutinise certain candidates for honours lists.

The third responsibility was added in 2005, following the Phillips Review of the honours system, see para 2.8 below.

The Appointments Commission was established with seven members: three representatives from the main political parties and four independent figures, one of whom chairs the Commission. The posts are part time and receive a small remuneration. Members of the current House of Lords are eligible for appointment.⁷⁹

For further details on the establishment of the Commission and its work, see Commons Library briefing paper [House of Lords Appointments Commission](#), Commons Library Standard Note SN/PC/02855, 28 February 2011.

4.8 Government response to Philips and Public Administration Select Committee (2005)

The Government published its response to the PASC recommendations in a command paper in February 2005, together with its response to the review by Sir Hayden Phillips.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ HC 212 2003-4, Summary

⁷⁹ HL Deb 8 February 2000 vol 309 WA78

⁸⁰ *Reform of the Honours System* Cmnd 6479 February 2005

The criteria for award of honours was set out there as:

The overriding principle is that awards should be made on merit.
Merit for honours is defined as:

Achievement

Exceptional service

In each strand, the standard, and the consequent criteria, should be high. In terms of service, honours should not just go with a job well done or because someone has reached a particular level. They should be awarded because an individual has, in plain terms, "gone the extra mile" in the contribution they have made. For distinction the standard should be that someone stands out "head and shoulders" above his or her peer group in what has been achieved. In some individuals these strands are intertwined.

Specific attention is paid to people who:

- have changed things, with an emphasis on practical achievement;
- have delivered in a way that has brought distinction to British life and enhanced the UK's reputation in the area or activity concerned or which has contributed in a distinctive way to improving the lot of those less able to help themselves;
- are examples of the best sustained and selfless voluntary service;
- have demonstrated innovation and entrepreneurship which is delivering results;
- carry the respect of their peers and are role models in their field; and
- have shown sustained achievement against the odds which has required moral courage in making tough choices and hard applications.

The Government rejected the more radical proposals from the Select Committee for an independent Honours Commission. They preferred to introduce more transparency and outside involvement into the current system of committees, which had been dominated by civil servants.

On 14 June 2005 the Prime Minister announced the names of the chairs who had agreed to serve on the specialist committees, following a selection process observing the requirements of the Code of Practice of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.⁸¹ On 5 September 2005 the Cabinet Office announced the membership of the new committees.⁸²

In terms of nominations for political honours, put forward by the Prime Minister, it was also announced that the House of Lords Appointments Commission would take over the role of vetting honours from the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee, which had been in existence since 1923.

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090118230434/http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/190754/cm6479honours_reform.pdf

⁸¹ HC Deb 14 June 2005 c10WS

⁸² "Government announces new honours system" *Cabinet Office News Release*

The House of Lords Appointments Commission had a more restricted role than the previous Political Honours Scrutiny Committee. The Commission was responsible only for a handful of honours where there had been direct prime ministerial or political involvement. The publication of Electoral Commission registers of donors to political parties was considered to replace the scrutiny of other types of honours.

The Appointments Commission gave further information on the honours it could consider in its Annual Report⁸³:

- individuals put forward by the political parties for political and public services;
- Members of Parliament who are being put forward for services to Parliament; and
- anyone added to the Honours List at a late stage, who would not therefore have been subject to the normal assessment and selection process.

It clarified the role it carried out as:

The Commission's remit does not extend to commenting upon the merits of an award. Its role is to advise the Prime Minister if there is anything in the past history, current circumstances or general character of an individual which might suggest that he or she is not a fit and proper person to be recommended for an award.

In effect the Commission only carried out this role in 2005 and 2006. In March 2006 the Prime Minister Tony Blair indicated that he would not make nominations for honours. The Appointments Commission retained this stated responsibility in its terms of reference, but noted in Annual Reports covering 2006-March 2010, that it had not been invited to review any nominations, not for peerages. From April 2010 the responsibility for non-peerage honours no longer appeared in the Commission's terms of reference.

The publication of Electoral Commission registers of donors to political parties was considered to replace the scrutiny of other types of honours, not directly considered by the House of Lords Commission. All candidates for senior awards are checked against these lists of donations. Details of candidates who have made recent donations are drawn to the attention of the Main Committee. Such donations do not disqualify a candidate from award of an honour. But the report on the operation of the honours system states:

[...]the Committee must be confident that the candidate would have been a meritorious recipient of an honour if he or she had not made a political donation.⁸⁴

The Government also promised to publish a three yearly report on the operation of the honours system, to give details of the guidance given to Chairs of Committees as well as statistics on awards made during the period. It also agreed to publish an annual digest on statistics on the

⁸³ House of Lords Appointments Commission, *Annual Report 2004-5 and 2005-6*, July 2006.

⁸⁴ Cabinet Office, *Three years of operation of the reformed honours system*, October 2008.

operation of honours, including the regional distribution. The latest three year review report was published in 2011.⁸⁵ There does not seem to have been a review published since then.

4.9 Prime Minister Tony Blair reforms (2006)

The then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, indicated on 23 March 2006 that he would divest himself of any personal involvement in recommending honours.⁸⁶ There were a handful of awards in this category annually. No resignation honours list was issued when Mr Blair stood down in June 2006.⁸⁷ When Gordon Brown took office in June 2007, he also confirmed that he would make no additions to the list of names recommended by the Main Committee and that the Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs and Defence would also make this commitment.⁸⁸

4.10 PASC inquiry. Police inquiry. (2006-07)

On 14 November 2005 the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) launched an inquiry into ethics and standards in public life. As part of this inquiry it intended to “look afresh at propriety issues in the award of honours”. Following allegations that loans were being made to political parties to circumvent the need to publish the names of donors to political parties, the Committee announced on 14 March 2006 that it would consider whether “the scrutiny of honours and peerages for political service was working”, and arranged evidence sessions for 28 March and 2 May 2006. However, on 21 March 2006, the Metropolitan Police announced that they were to conduct an inquiry into allegations that offences had been committed under the *Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act 1925*. These allegations were made by Plaid Cymru and the SNP.

Deputy Assistant Commissioner John Yates asked the Committee to postpone its inquiry because “many of the individuals that you wished to hear evidence from may be the very people that could be central to our criminal inquiry, either as witnesses or suspects”. In the light of advice PASC received from the police and Speaker’s Counsel, it decided to “have a short pause in our inquiry”.⁸⁹

The PASC inquiry was actually put on hold until October 2007. The Committee announced in July 2007 that the inquiry was to be resumed.⁹⁰ These developments followed the Crown Prosecution

⁸⁵ Cabinet Office, [Second report on the operation of the reformed honours system](#), December 2011.

⁸⁶ HC Deb 23 March 2006 c34WS

⁸⁷ According to the *Times* (“Blair’s resignation list to be vetted” 16 May 2007) Tony Wright, chairman of PASC stated that any resignation honours list would be subject to scrutiny by the Appointments Commission in agreement with no 10 Downing Street

⁸⁸ *The Governance of Britain* Cm 7170 July 2007, para 85

⁸⁹ Public Administration Select Committee, *Inquiry into the Scrutiny of Political Honours*, 30 March 2006, HC 1020 2005-06; PASC Press Notice No 8 (2005-06), *Guarding the Guardians: PASC inquires into Ethical Regulators*, 14 November 2005; PASC Press Notice No 29 (2005-06), *PASC to probe scrutiny of political honours*, 14 March 2006

⁹⁰ Public Administration Select Committee Press Notice No 47 (2006-07), *PASC statement on Propriety and Honours*, 24 July 2007;

Service's (CPS) announcement on 20 July 2007 that no-one would face charges over donations to the Labour Party in the cash for honours investigation; although it was not until 9 October 2007 that the CPS announced that no-one would face charges over donations to the Conservative Party in the 'cash for honours' investigation. (Further details of the "cash for honours" investigation are given in the Library Standard Note *Loans to Political Parties*.⁹¹)

PASC took evidence from Deputy Assistant Commissioner Yates and his colleagues whilst the police investigation was underway. Although the evidence was taken in private, PASC said that it would be "in some form, with agreement, be published as part of the report". It published "Interim Findings" in July 2006, including the evidence from the Metropolitan Police. It made a number of recommendations relating to political honours. It recommended that the Appointment Commission's "role, powers and independence should be defined in state as soon as possible". It also called on the Commission to consult political parties and more widely on criteria that should be used in assessing propriety and how they should be interpreted.⁹²

PASC published their final report, *Propriety and Peerages* on 18 December 2007.⁹³ This concluded that the effect of the undertaking made by Tony Blair in March 2006 not to add or subtract to the recommendations for honours submitted by the Main Committee was to 'take politics and patronage out of the honours system'.⁹⁴ PASC considered that this commitment should be binding on all future Prime Ministers. The rest of its recommendations were addressed towards the awarding of peerages and are not dealt with in this Note.

PASC did however consider that "the framing of the 1925 Act makes it extremely difficult, barring any direct evidence of explicit agreements, to put together a case which the CPS would be willing to prosecute" (para 53). It recommended as follows:

82. Consideration should be given to subsuming the specific law on abuses around honours and peerages into a new general Corruption Act.[...]

84. However, corruption in the public sector remains very rarely prosecuted, and it may always be difficult to secure convictions. Any attempt to bribe or to solicit bribes of any kind ought to be effectively punishable; but our first priority ought not to be refining the law to punish offenders. It must be preferable to take steps to prevent offences from being committed. In the case of preventing the sale of peerages, this should be approached through better regulation of political parties and their funding, and a better appointments process for the House of Lords.⁹⁵

⁹¹ House of Commons Library Standard Note SN/PC/3960, *Loans to political parties*,

⁹² Public Administration Select Committee, *Propriety and Honours: Interim Findings*, 13 July 2006, HC 1119 2005-06. This summary is taken from Appendix 3 of Research Paper 07/82

⁹³ Public Administration Select Committee, *Propriety and Peerages*, 18 December 2007, HC 153 2007-08

⁹⁴ *Ibid* para 27

⁹⁵ HC 153, paras 82-84

4.11 Prime Minister David Cameron changes. (2012)

On 17 May 2012, the Prime Minister announced that he had established a new honours committee, the Parliamentary and Political Service Honours Committee, to recognise political service at Westminster and the devolved legislatures:

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): The previous Government had a policy of not recommending honours for political service, although some individuals were honoured for services to Parliament. The Government believe that there are many people in politics who demonstrate selfless commitment for the good of the nation and that it is right to recognise the best of them. [...]

The official members are the three Commons Chief Whips of the major parties. There are also to be at least four independent members. [...]

The membership has been chosen to include a balance of party members and those who do not have known party allegiances but have a good awareness of Parliament and the bodies which report to it. [...]

The new committee has been established for the birthday 2012 honours round and has the support of the three main parties. As with all the specialist honours committees, its recommendations are subject to the agreement of the main honours committee, chaired by the head of the civil service.⁹⁶

In evidence to the Public Administration Select Committee, the initial allocation of honours to the committee was announced as:

Four knighthoods/damehoods, four CBEs, six OBEs, nine MBEs and two BEMs for distribution in each honours round.⁹⁷

4.12 Public Administration Select Committee Reports (2012)

The last major review of the operation of the award of honours was the inquiry conducted by the Commons Public Administration Select Committee in 2012. Its first report on the subject of that year, *The Honours System*, was published on 31 August 2012.⁹⁸

The Select Committee reported their findings on the distribution of honours and on the public attitude to awards. They found that while honours were greatly valued by recipients, reform of the system was, in their view, required to create a system properly befitting the achievements and service of those being honoured.

The report set out proposals to reform the honours system to reduce the influence of politicians and civil servants, to increase accountability

⁹⁶ HC Deb 17 May 2012 cc42Ws-43WS

⁹⁷ Public Administration Select Committee, *The Honours System*, 29 August 2012, HC 19 2012-13, para 93

⁹⁸ [Public Administration Select Committee, The Honours System](#), 31 August 2012, HC 19 2012-13

and transparency and to strengthen the link to the Monarch. The Committee recommended:

- the introduction of an independent Honours Commission to consider nominations (a repeat recommendation from the last parliament);
- that the Prime Minister's "strategic direction" over the honours system be removed;
- a rebalancing of the proportion of honours awarded to civil servants and public sector workers, and volunteers in their local communities;
- that longer citations should be published, explaining the reason for awarding an honour;
- that the Lords Lieutenant should have an opportunity to consider and comment on all nominations for an honour within his or her lieutenancy; and
- that the Cabinet Office set out proposals for broadening the range of people who take up roles as independent members of the honours committees.
- That the Honours Forfeiture Committee be made independent and transparent, with clear and expanded criteria for forfeiture, chaired by an independent figure, such as a retired high court judge.

The Committee commented specifically on the new Parliamentary and Political Service Honours Committee as part of its report. It was concerned at the lack of parliamentary involvement in the establishment of the new committee.⁹⁹

The Committee considered that the membership of the Chief Whips of the three main parties on the Parliamentary and Political Service Honours Committee was inappropriate and that there should be no set allocation of honours for political service.

The Public Administration Select Committee published a further report on 23 November 2012, with the Government's response to its first 2012 report included.¹⁰⁰ The Government response reiterated their position that there were no longer any automatic honours for those who "just do the job".

The Government had accepted the suggestion on using longer citations for the highest honours in published lists, to build public confidence in the reasons for an award. They had also set out plans to encourage Government Departments and the Devolved Administrations to make more effective use of Lord-Lieutenants, but rejected on grounds of volume giving them the opportunity to comment on all nominations in their area.

⁹⁹ Ibid para 84.

¹⁰⁰ Public Administration Select Committee, *The Honours System: Further Report with the Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2012-13*. HC 728 2012-13

In most cases the Government refuted or did not accept the Select Committee's recommendations. This included the proposal for an Independent Honours Commission and for an independent Honours Forfeiture Committee.

The Government rejected criticism on the setting up of the new Parliamentary and Political Honours Committee stating that:

All three main parties were consulted before the Committee was created, and Parliament was informed by a Written Ministerial Statement. Future vacancies for independent members will be publicly advertised, in line with the practice on the other honours selection committees. They will remain in the majority.

The Government defended the membership of the Chief Whips on the Committee:

The Government represents the minor Parties, who might be entirely unrepresented if the political members of the Political and Parliamentary Service Committee were elected. Such elections would also risk politicising the work of the Committee, a development that the Government is keen to prevent.

The Government also rejected a call for there to be no set allocation of honours for the Committee to award:

As with all the honours selection committees, the number of honours allocated to the Political and Parliamentary Service Honours Committee is a guideline, not a fixed quota - and all the committees need some form of guideline. [...] Its allocation will nonetheless be reviewed in the Quinquennial Review this autumn.¹⁰¹

In its further report of November 2012, the Select Committee was critical of the decision of the Prime Minister to make awards outside of the new Parliamentary and Political Service Honours Committee:

7. Subsequent to the publication of our Report we were surprised by the Prime Minister's decision to bypass the Committee he had so recently established in order to award honours to five ministers who had lost their jobs in the Government's September 2012 reshuffle (correspondence between the Prime Minister and PASC on this matter is at appendix 2). Such a move does indeed constitute politicisation of the honours system and flies in the face of the stated position of the Government, as expressed only weeks earlier in oral evidence by Sir Bob Kerslake, the Head of the Civil Service. Without questioning the public service of those selected, by the Prime Minister, to receive honours at the end of their ministerial career, we are concerned that awarding honours in such a manner will further reduce public confidence in the honours system. Again, if the Government supports such political control of the award of honours in certain circumstances, it should be prepared to justify that.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ [Quinquennial Review 2013-18](#), published March 2013, maintained the allocation of 25 awards to the Committee, as announced in May 2012.

¹⁰² *ibid*

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