



Nominations to select committees

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On 24 November 2009, the Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons' Report – *Rebuilding the House* – was published. The Committee recommended that the chairs of departmental and similar select committees be directly elected by secret ballot of the House using the alternative vote; and that members of departmental and similar committees should be elected from within party groups by secret ballot. The recommendations were debated in the Chamber on 22 February and 4 March 2010, and then implemented in June 2010, following the general election on 6 May.

This note outlines the background to various proposals that have been made for changes to the way in which the members of select committees are nominated. It includes details of the proposals made by the Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, which was established in July 2009 to advise on reforms to, *inter alia*, make select committee processes more democratic; and details of the recommendations adopted by the House. It also includes details of the initial operation of the new system of elected select committee chairs, and nominations, from June 2010 onwards.

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1 Previous practice

Until 2010, motions for the entire membership of select committees, at the beginning of a Parliament (or subsequent changes in membership during the course of a Parliament), were tabled by a Member, normally the Chairman, of the Committee of Selection.¹ All such motions were debatable. However, in practice, as all nominations to select committees were sanctioned by party whips, debate was rare. In *Parliament: Functions, Practice and Procedures*, Robert Blackburn and Andrew Kennon described the role of the whips in taking party nominations for membership of select committees to the Committee of Selection. Each party had slightly different methods, but with major involvement of the whips.²

A notable exception to the routine practice was the proposed membership of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee in 2001, when Donald Anderson's and Gwyneth Dunwoody's names were not on the original list.³ This led to the list being voted down by the House. Another example is the debate over the membership of regional select committees, where the main opposition parties (Conservative and Liberal Democrat) refused to nominate members to the committees.⁴

The fact that the nomination process was in the hands of the whips has caused controversy, and various attempts and suggestions were made, during the 2000s, to alter the system. For instance, the Parliamentary Labour Party's internal system was modified in 2002: nominations, made by the Chief Whip and Parliamentary Committee, had to be ratified by the Parliamentary Labour Party. Section 6 reviews some proposals that were made to change the way select committee members were nominated between 2000 and 2009.

2 Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons: proposals for change

The Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons (the Wright Committee) was appointed to advise on reforms to the House, *inter alia*, to make select committee processes more democratic.⁵ The Committee's report, *Rebuilding the House*, was published on 24 November 2009.⁶ In its summary, the Committee outlined its recommendations on the nomination processes for the chairs and members of departmental and similar select committees:

The Committee recommends that the Chairs of departmental and similar select committees be directly elected by secret ballot of the House using the alternative vote. The distribution of individual chairs between parties should be agreed as now by the parties, on the basis of a proportionate division conveyed to them by the Speaker, and put to the House for its agreement. Candidates for chairs would be required to have a

¹ All select committees are nominated in this way, except the Committee of Selection itself, the Liaison Committee, the Committee on Standards and Privileges and any committee nominated under a temporary standing order (Standing Order No 121; HC Deb 7 June 2004 cc93-115)

² Robert Blackburn and Andrew Kennon, *Griffith and Ryle on Parliament: Functions, Practice and Procedures*, 2nd edition, 2003, p166

³ The original motions were debated on 16 July 2001 (HC Deb 16 July 2001 cc35-76; c77; c81); revised motions including Mr Anderson and Mrs Dunwoody were passed on 19 July 2001 (HC Deb 19 July 2001 cc508-516;c517; c520)

⁴ For example: HC Deb 3 March 2009 cc781-806; HC Deb 14 December 2009 cc748-767; other debates have been held on motions to change the members of regional select committees

⁵ The Library Standard Note [The Report of the Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, Rebuilding the House](#), SN/PC/5294 outlines the background to the establishment of the Committee and its conclusions

⁶ House of Commons Reform Committee, *Rebuilding the House*, 24 November 2009, HC 1117 2008-09

minimum level of support from within their party as well as being free to demonstrate support from other Members.

The Committee recommends that members of departmental and similar committees should be elected from within party groups by secret ballot, each party choosing its own publicly declared method approved by the Speaker as democratic and transparent, and that the names then be transmitted to the House for its endorsement.⁷

The Committee set out more detail in its main report. The Committee had considered a number of methods of selecting members and chairs of committees, and set out some of their reasoning in favour of their preferred option in the report. They first considered the following options:

- Maintaining the current system but with democratic safeguards: meaning transparent intra-party elections of select committee members by secret ballot conducted under the auspices of the House authorities, and a secret ballot within the committee for election of a chair from a party openly identified in advance.
- Creation of a “selectorate” committee of senior members to whom application for a select committee place could be made, who would present their proposals to the House, based on Members’ “expertise” and demonstrable interest in the committee’s subject area.
- Election by secret ballot of the House of members of select committees and/or of chairs.⁸

The Committee first ruled out the use of a selectorate as such a system would not meet the current mood of the House. Instead the Committee considered four options based on the use of elections:

- election of members and chair of select committees by secret ballot of the whole House;
- election of members of select committees by secret ballot of the whole House, with the Committee then electing their own chair from amongst their number;
- election of chairs of select committees by secret ballot of the whole House, with the election of committee members through party groups;
- the election of chairs and members of select committees through party groups.

The Committee favoured the election of chairs by secret ballot of the whole House, with the election of committee members through party groups:

We recommend an initial system of election by the whole House of Chairs of departmental and similar select committees, and thereafter the election by secret ballot of members of those committees by each political party, according to their level of representation in the House, and using transparent and democratic means. The committees within this system should be those appointed under SO No 152 [the departmental select committees] together with the Environmental Audit Committee, the Public Administration Committee and the Committee of Public Accounts. We have concluded that of the four options we considered this is the system most likely to demonstrate the determination of the House more effectively to hold the executive to account, to give more authority to the scrutiny function of Parliament and at the same

⁷ *Ibid*, Summary

⁸ *Ibid*, para 76

time to preserve the effective functioning of select committees. We also believe that it is likely to command widespread support in the House as a major step forward, but short of more radical proposals. It should give a major boost to these select committees, help establish the position of their Chairs, and increase the standing of their elected members.⁹

The Committee recognised that, when the new system was run for the first time, the House might prefer to rely on party managers coming to an agreement on the distribution of chairs on the basis of established conventions, with the results of this distribution announced to the House by the Speaker.¹⁰

The Committee also set out a more detailed proposal for the election, within party groups, of the members of select committees:

We propose that in the new Parliament members of departmental and similar select committees should be elected by secret ballot within party groups, by transparent and democratic processes, with the outcome reported to and endorsed by the House. ...

Party groups would in effect be acting on behalf of the House as electoral colleges. They would therefore expect to act under some constraints as to the methods used to elect committee members. We do not think it necessary that the House should interfere so far as to lay down one particular method of election rather than another. But the method chosen should be one approved by the Speaker, following independent advice, as transparent and democratic: "kite-marked" as legitimate in effect. Officers nominated by the Speaker would be obliged to assure themselves that the processes followed by each party, as notified by its Leader, were indeed in accordance with these norms. And each party would be obliged to publish the method it had adopted.¹¹

The Committee recommended that the system should be reviewed after two years, and that this would be an appropriate time to see whether the system should be extended to other select committees.¹²

The Committee also made several other recommendations in relation to the operation of the select committee system:

- under any system, the principal select committees should be nominated within no more than six weeks of the Queen's Speech and that this should be laid down in Standing Orders and capable of being enforced by the Speaker;¹³
- the House should adopt the practice the Committee was following of the use of the gender-neutral term 'Chair' to denote the individual chairing a committee, and 'chair' to denote the office held, save where a particular officer is denoted, such as the Chairman of Ways and Means;¹⁴
- the new House of Commons should reduce the size of its standard departmental committees to not more than 11. Members in individual cases could be added to specific committees to accommodate the legitimate demands of the smaller parties;

⁹ *Ibid*, para 80

¹⁰ *Ibid*, para 83

¹¹ *Ibid*, paras 87-88

¹² *Ibid*, para 82

¹³ *Ibid*, para 56

¹⁴ *Ibid*, para 37

- the practice of appointing parliamentary private secretaries and front bench Official Opposition spokesmen should cease;
- there should be clear consequences for unreasonable absence from select committees;
- the House should seek to reduce the number of committees, ending overlapping or duplicate remits; and
- the Liaison Committee should re-examine the current role of select committees, their resources and their tasks, and in particular how to deal with the increasing demands made of Members as their role grows.¹⁵

3 Reactions to the Wright Committee's recommendations

The Liaison Committee's report, *Rebuilding the House: Select Committee Issues*, was published on 27 January 2010.¹⁶ The objective of the report was "to inform the House as it considers the Reform Committee's recommendations", relating to select committees.¹⁷

The Liaison Committee supported the proposal that the division of chairs between the parties should be based on the current system of agreement between the party managers, but with a greater degree of transparency.¹⁸ It also endorsed the proposal for the election of chairs by the whole House, with a review after two years.

Although the Liaison Committee was unanimous in this observation, it divided on a motion to leave out its support for the Reform Committee's proposal for the election of chairs by the whole House. A motion to leave out the rest of the paragraph was defeated by seven votes to six.¹⁹

The Liaison Committee supported the Reform Committee's recommendation that party groups should be responsible for electing their share of members to committees, using a system of election validated by the Speaker.²⁰ It also supported the recommendation that select committees should be set up within six weeks of the opening of a new Parliament.²¹

The Liaison Committee supported "the proposal for the exclusion of Ministers, opposition frontbenchers (except possibly for the smaller parties) and Parliamentary Private Secretaries from eligibility for membership of select committees".²² It also suggested how the Reform Committee's proposal to remove members with poor attendance could be implemented:

The Reform Committee recommends that there should be "clear consequences for unreasonable absence from select committees" but is not more specific. We agree with the principle and propose that, **to fit in with the proposed new system of elections, any member of a select committee whose cumulative attendance during a Session is below 60% should be automatically discharged at the end of that Session on the basis of a report made by the Clerk of Committees to the Speaker. The Speaker would have discretion to waive the application of the rule**

¹⁵ *Ibid*, paras 55-59

¹⁶ Liaison Committee, *Rebuilding the House: Select Committee Issues*, 27 January 2010, HC 272 2009-10

¹⁷ *Ibid*, para 3

¹⁸ *Ibid*, paras 5-6

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Formal Minutes

²⁰ *Ibid*, para 11

²¹ *Ibid*, para 12

²² *Ibid*, para 13

in cases such as ill-health, etc. New elections should be held to fill the vacancies so created within two weeks of the opening of the next Session.²³

Debates were also instigated by Graham Allen on 26 November 2009,²⁴ and Mark Fisher on 15 December 2009.²⁵

4 Government actions in early 2010

4.1 Government response, January 2010

On 20 January 2010, the Prime Minister announced that the Government would propose accepting the Committee's recommendations on electing chairs and members of select committees:

... We are grateful to the Committee for making proposals for reforming the Committee system. The Government will make time available for a debate and the House will have an opportunity to decide on the Committee's recommendations. The Government want the House to agree a way forward, and we will therefore propose accepting many of the Committee's recommendations, including electing Chairmen and members of Select Committees, scheduling non-Government business and strengthening the role of Back Benchers to hold the Government to account.²⁶

The following day, 21 January, the Leader of the House expanded briefly on the Prime Minister's comments and announced that the Report would be debated on 23 February 2010:

... the Government propose to accept a large number of the recommendations of the Wright Committee's report, including the election of Chairmen and members of Select Committees, a House Committee for scheduling non-Government businesses, and allowing Back Benchers to initiate debates on motions that will be voted on by the House. We intend to bring the matter to the House for debate and decision on 23 February.²⁷

However, at Business Questions on 4 February, the Leader of the House announced that the debate would take place on 22 February 2010.²⁸ Then on 9 February, in a written ministerial statement, she announced that:

For any Motions which are opposed, we will make time for a further debate and, if necessary, votes. We are considering providing a day to do this no later than the week following the debate, provisionally at the sitting on Thursday 4 March. This will be confirmed during the business statement in the normal way.²⁹

The Government's motions – tabled in response to the report from the Select Committee on Reform of the House appeared among the remaining orders and notices on 8 February 2010. In total, 16 Government motions to implement some of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Reform of the House appeared among the Remaining Orders and Notices for the first time.

Six of these motions related to the appointment of select committees. However, following their initial appearance among the Remaining Orders, Members tabled various amendments

²³ *Ibid*, para 16

²⁴ HC Deb 26 November 2009 cc799-808

²⁵ HC Deb 15 December 2009 c198WH

²⁶ HC Deb 20 January 2010 c297

²⁷ HC Deb 21 January 2010 c431

²⁸ HC Deb 4 February 2010 c462

²⁹ HC Deb 9 February 2010 c46WS

to them. In some cases the Government made changes to their motions in response to these amendments.³⁰

In a written ministerial statement on 9 February 2010, the Government set out its support for the Committee's proposals relating to select committees.³¹

The Government support the Committee's recommendation for the election of Select Committee Chairs by secret ballot of the whole House. We have tabled two motions for new Standing Orders, one to provide for the ballot and one to allow elected Chairs either to resign voluntarily, or to be removed if they have lost the confidence of their committee.

The Government support the election of Select Committee members by each party, and believe that each party should be free to devise its own arrangements, whether by secret ballot or otherwise. To enable this now to go forward, we have tabled a motion to take note of the Committee's recommendation. We have also tabled a motion to approve the Committee's recommendation that Select Committees ought to be appointed within six weeks of the beginning of the new Session following an election.³²

4.2 General debate and decisions – 22 February 2010

On 22 February 2010, the House debated the Reform Committee's report on the following motion:

That this House has considered the matter of the report from the House of Commons Reform Committee on rebuilding the House.³³

After that debate, a number of motions to implement recommendations made by the Reform Committee's were considered without further debate. This procedure meant that any motions objected to would return to the House for debate and decision at a later date.

The motions on "Nomination of Select Committees" to nominate Members within six weeks of the beginning of a new Parliament; and on "Reduction in Size of Select Committees" to limit all departmental select committees, except the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (13 members), to 11 members were agreed to without a division.³⁴ These changes were to be effective in the new Parliament.

The following motions were objected to:

- Chair (Terminology);
- Election of Select Committee Chairs;
- Resignation or Removal of Chairs of Select Committees; and
- Election of Members of Select Committees.³⁵

4.3 Decisions of 4 March 2010

A debate on those motions that were objected to on 22 February 2010 took place on 4 March. An allocation of time motion provided for two hours debate (less any time spent on the allocation of time motion) on the four motions listed above, and others on other

³⁰ An earlier version of this Standard Note shows the evolution of the Government's motions

³¹ HC Deb 9 February 2010 c46WS

³² HC Deb 9 February 2010 c46WS

³³ HC Deb 22 February 2010 cc37-127

³⁴ HC Deb 22 February 2010 c130

³⁵ HC Deb 22 February 2010 cc127-129

recommendations of the Reform Committee that had been objected to on 22 February. The House reached the following decisions on the membership of select committees.

Chair (Terminology)

The House agreed on a division, by 206 votes to 90, that the gender-neutral term “chair(s)” should replace references to “chairman(men)” in the House’s Standing Orders, Orders and Resolutions. Exceptions would be made to references to the titles of “Chairman of Ways and Means, Deputy Chairman or Chairman and Lord Chairman of Committees”.³⁶

Election of Committee Chairs

The House agreed a new Standing Order that set out procedures for allocating the chairs of select committees between parties and then for their election by the whole House by secret ballot.

The House agreed to three backbench amendments to the motion, which had been tabled by the Government:

- (1) As well as agreeing to elect the chairs of departmental select committees (under Standing Order No 152), of the Environmental Audit Committee, of the Public Administration Select Committee, and of the Public Accounts Committee, it also agreed to elect the chair of the Procedure Committee, without a division;³⁷
- (2) The original motion provided that party leaders had, within a week of the Queen’s Speech, to specify which party each chair would be allocated to. An amendment was agreed to, by 279 votes to 31, to enable any Member to table a motion to allocate chairs, if the party leaders had not done so “on the expiry of two weeks after the Queen’s Speech”;³⁸ and
- (3) An amendment specifying that the chair of the Public Accounts Committee had to be a member of the official Opposition was agreed to without a division.³⁹

The new Standing Order is set out in the Appendix.

Resignation or removal

The House agreed to the motion on the resignation or removal of chairs of select committees without a division.⁴⁰

Election of members of select committees

The House agreed that members of select committees should be elected by party groups in a transparent and democratic method of each party’s choosing, but the Resolution did not require parties to obtain the Speaker’s approval for their electoral system, as proposed by the Reform Committee. However, before doing so, it also agreed an amendment, without a division, that would allow members with poor attendance records to be discharged from select committees.⁴¹

³⁶ HC Deb 4 March 2010 cc1086-1088

³⁷ HC Deb 4 March 2010 c1090

³⁸ HC Deb 4 March 2010 cc1090-1093

³⁹ HC Deb 4 March 2010 c1093

⁴⁰ HC Deb 4 March 2010 cc1094-1095

⁴¹ HC Deb 4 March 2010 c1095

The House also supported the establishment of a Backbench Business Committee in the following session.⁴²

The motions agreed by the House to implement recommendations of the Reform Committee on these and on other issues are outlined in the Library Standard Note [Reform of the House of Commons: Decisions taken on 22 February and 4 March 2010](#).

5 Nominations in the 2010 Parliament

5.1 Allocation of chairs

Following the 2010 General Election, changes to the Standing Orders had effect. Initially, the rights to the chairs of select committees were divided up by the major parties, via the usual channels. The Conservative Party was allocated 12 chairs; the Labour Party, 10; and Liberal Democrats, two. Nominations for chairs to each individual committee could only come from the party to which that chair had been allocated. This agreement was put to the House on 26 May, in a joint motion in the names of the leaders of the three main parties. There was a very brief debate, and the motion was passed without a division.⁴³

The Leader of the House also noted:

The Wright Committee recommended that Ministers and Parliamentary Private Secretaries should voluntarily abstain from voting in the ballot for the Chair of the Select Committee that shadows their Department. The Government accept that recommendation, and I urge ministerial colleagues to abide by it.⁴⁴

The Backbench Business Committee was not allocated to a particular party: one Labour and one Conservative candidate stood for election as its chair.

5.2 Elections: procedure

Nomination papers had to include nominations from at least fifteen members of the nominee's own party (or ten percent of their membership, whichever is less), and five members from other parties. Nominations for select committee chairs closed at 5pm on 8 June. At that point, eight committee chairs had only one nomination, and those individuals were therefore elected. Elections for the contested positions took place on 9 June 2010, under the Alternative Vote. All members could vote in all elections: this was not restricted by party. Full results can be found on Parliament's website.⁴⁵

Members were then sought within party groups for each committee. Many members self-proposed, particularly new members. Places on some committees were oversubscribed, whilst in other cases there was less interest. In the latter cases, some places were filled after the election process took place.⁴⁶ The motions for membership were passed by the House on 12 July.⁴⁷

⁴² [HC Deb 4 Mar 2010 c1087-1097](#)

⁴³ [HC Deb 26 May 2010 cc171-173](#)

⁴⁴ [HC Deb 26 May 2010 c172](#)

⁴⁵ House of Commons, [Results of elections for select committee chairs announced](#), 10 June 2010

⁴⁶ The *Financial Times*' "[Westminster blog](#)" gave a snapshot of this situation on 12 July 2010, just in advance of the motion from the Committee of Selection, which went before the House later that day.

⁴⁷ [HC Deb 12 July 2010 c763](#)

5.3 Size of committees

Although the Wright Committee had recommended the reduction in the size of departmental select committees to 11 members, it added that “Members in individual cases can be added to specific committees to accommodate the legitimate demands of the smaller parties”.⁴⁸

On 15 June 2010, the Government brought forward proposals to make a number of committees bigger to accommodate members from smaller parties. However, it did so without consulting select committee chairs. Following criticism in the debate, the Government did not move its motion.⁴⁹ It brought forward further proposals on 30 June 2010, when David Heath, the Deputy Leader of the House explained that:

The Government accept the view, expressed by the Wright Committee and the Liaison Committee, that smaller Committees are generally preferable. However, the Wright Committee also acknowledged the desirability of ensuring that smaller parties were properly represented. There is a clear tension between these two objectives, and I hope that the House can agree that these proposals represent a fair compromise between the two.⁵⁰

On 30 June, the House agreed that changes should be made to the size of five committees. The Defence, Justice and Welsh Affairs Committee were increased from 11 members to 12; the Treasury Committee from 11 members to 14; and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee from 13 members to 14.⁵¹

6 Previous proposals for change

6.1 Liaison Committee report, 2000

In March 2000, the Liaison Committee reviewed the operation of departmental select committees. It identified a number of problems with the nomination process being in the hands of the whips, concluded that it was “wrong in principle”, and proposed a new system of nomination. It suggested that the House should appoint a Chairman of Committees and two deputies at the very beginning of a Parliament. These three Members would then invite names for the membership of committees, either self-proposals or proposals from others: the whips would be free to make proposals of their own.⁵²

The Government indicated in its reply that it was not convinced that a change to the system was needed:

... The Government do not believe that the Committee of Selection nominates Members to serve on Select Committees in the same way that it nominates Members to serve on Committees on Private Bill or on Standing Committees, nor that this is demonstrated by the use of lists in each case. The membership of select committees, unlike the membership of Standing Committees, has to be endorsed by the House as a

⁴⁸ Select committee on Reform of the House of Commons, *rebuilding the House*, 24 November 2009, HC 1117, para 55

⁴⁹ HC Deb 15 June 2010 cc785-786; 833-835

⁵⁰ HC Deb 30 June 2010 c965

⁵¹ HC Deb 30 June 2010 cc965-967

⁵² Liaison Committee, *Shifting the Balance: Select Committees and the Executive*, 3 March 2000, HC 300 1999-2000, paras 10-20

whole. The House may refuse to accept the Committee of Selection's proposals, and has done so in the past.⁵³

A year after its initial report, the Liaison Committee acknowledged that the House had rejected its proposals for changes to the way in which select committees were nominated, but continued to call for changes in the process.⁵⁴

6.2 Commission to Strengthen Parliament, July 2000

The Commission to Strengthen Parliament, appointed by the Conservative Party leader, William Hague, and chaired by Lord Norton of Louth, made a number of recommendations for parliamentary reform. This included reconstituting the Liaison Committee as a Select Committee Panel, which would select the members of select committees. This followed a similar recommendation in the Liaison Committee's own report.⁵⁵

6.3 The Modernisation Committee's proposals for change

In the 2001-02 session, the Modernisation Committee published a report on select committees. In the wake of the House's rejection of nominations made by the Committee of Selection, the Modernisation Committee decided to reconsider the nomination process.⁵⁶

The Committee rejected a proposal that the members of select committees should be directly elected by the House. It argued that parties should continue to play a role in the nomination process: "It is natural that the selection of nominations to the places allocated to each party should in the first instance be conducted within that party". The Committee was not attracted to the Liaison Committee's proposal for a Select Committee Panel, and noted that the House had rejected the idea in any case (in the debate in February 2001). It also ruled out a role for the Liaison Committee, as by definition it would not have been established at the beginning of a Parliament. Instead, it suggested the establishment of a Committee of Nomination, chaired by the Chairman of Ways and Means, and comprising seven further members, all from the Chairmen's Panel.⁵⁷

The Modernisation Committee's report on *Select Committees* was debated on 14 May 2002. At the end of the debate a motion to establish the Committee of Nomination was rejected by 209 votes to 195.⁵⁸ Some concern was expressed that the whips had encouraged Members to vote against the motion, despite an expectation of a free vote.⁵⁹

6.4 Parliament First, *Parliament's Last Chance*, April 2003

Parliament First, an all party group of Members of Parliament, argued in favour of a system of election of select committee chairmen by the whole House:

We believe that the House should return quickly to that issue if not the same proposal.

We recommend that a system is devised to allow select committee chairmen to

⁵³ President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, *The Government's Response to the First Report from the Liaison Committee on Shifting the Balance: Select Committees and the Executive*, May 2000, Cm 4737, para 7

⁵⁴ Liaison Committee, *Shifting the Balance: Unfinished Business*, 15 March 2001, HC 321 2000-01, paras 13 and 21

⁵⁵ Commission to Strengthen Parliament, *Strengthening Parliament*, July 2000, p29

⁵⁶ Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, *Select Committees*, 12 February 2002, HC 224 2001-02

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, paras 10-18

⁵⁸ HC Deb 14 May 2002 cc716-719

⁵⁹ *Ibid* c720

be elected by secret ballot of the whole House. It is vital that select committees are put under the control to backbenchers (for whom the system was designed) and not the executive and whips. There would have to be division of chairmanships along party lines as at present but then the House as a whole should be given control...⁶⁰

6.5 Conservative Party Democracy Task Force, June 2007

This Conservative Party Democracy Task Force, established by David Cameron and chaired by Kenneth Clarke, recommended a system where:

...once Chairmanships of Select Committees have been allocated between parties, the chairmen should be elected for a parliament by a secret ballot of the whole House. By making them Parliament's spokesmen on particular issues, this change would give a dramatic boost to the prestige and authority of committee chairmen. They would have the opportunity to become spokesmen for Parliament as a whole. They would also feel a sense of duty to the people who elected them.⁶¹

6.6 Backbench proposals

Until the growing pressure for reform of the House of Commons, in the wake of the expenses scandal of 2009, there was little pressure for change after the rejection of the Modernisation Committee's recommendation in 2002. There were a few instances of the issue being kept alive by individual Members. Gordon Prentice tabled an Early Day Motion following the introduction of an additional salary for the chairmen of select committees, which called for "less opaque" nomination procedures in political parties.⁶² On 30 June 2005, Derek Wyatt tabled an Early Day Motion calling for changes in the way in which select committee members and chairmen were appointed.⁶³

A further motion was placed on the Order Paper by Members from a range of parties to amend Standing Order No. 121 on the nomination of select committees:

(1) Standing Order No. 121 (Nomination of Select Committees) shall be repealed and the following Standing Order be made:

Election of Select Committees

- (1) Within seven days of his election at the beginning of a Parliament the Speaker shall call for nominations in writing for each of the select committees appointed under the Standing Orders of this House; and any Member may nominate any other Member who is willing to serve.
- (2) The Members shall be elected by secret ballot under such arrangements as the Speaker shall direct, provided that each Member of the House shall have one vote in respect of each select committee.
- (3) The Speaker shall appoint one Member from the minority parties to each select committee; 'minority parties' means those opposition parties other than the largest opposition party.
- (4) Each select committee shall elect its chairman from among its members.

⁶⁰ Parliament First, *Parliament's Last Chance*, 2003, p50

⁶¹ Conservative Party Democracy Task Force, *Power to the People: Rebuilding Parliament*, June 2007, pp2-3

⁶² Early Day Motion 1923, 2002-03

⁶³ Early Day Motion 470, 2005/06

The motion also called for a review of the operation of the proposed new process, one year after it was implemented. The motion regularly appeared among the Remaining Orders and Notices throughout the 2005 Parliament.

Appendix: Standing Order No 122B – Election of select committee chairs (as agreed by the House on 4 March 2010)

(1) The chairs of the following select committees shall be elected by the House in accordance with paragraphs (2) to (14) below:

- (a) select committees appointed under Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments);
- (aa) the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee; [added 7 June 2010]
- (b) the Environmental Audit Committee;
- (c) the Select Committee on Public Administration;
- (d) the Committee of Public Accounts; and
- (e) the Select Committee on Procedure.

(2) The day following his election at the start of a new Parliament, the Speaker shall communicate to the leaders of each party represented in the House the proportion of chairs of select committees to be elected under this order falling to each such party which would reflect the composition of the House.

(3) If, within a week of the Queen's Speech, a motion in the name of the leaders of all the parties entitled to one or more chairs of select committees subject to election under this order specifying to which party each such chair is allocated is moved, the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion shall be put not later than one hour after their commencement, proceedings on the motion shall be exempted business and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.

(4) If a motion to which paragraph (3) above applies also makes changes to Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) which are consequential on changes to the machinery of government, then the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion shall be put not later than one and a half hours after their commencement; proceedings on the motion shall be exempted business; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.

(5) If, on the expiry of two weeks after the Queen's Speech, no motion in the name of the leaders of all the parties entitled to one or more chairs of select committees subject to election under this order specifying to which party each said chair is allocated has been tabled, on the following sitting day the Speaker shall give precedence to a motion tabled thereafter by any Member to allocate chairs under this order and the provisions of paragraphs (3) and (4) shall apply to proceedings on such a motion.

(6) If the House has agreed a motion allocating chairs to parties the election of the chairs shall take place in accordance with the remaining provisions of this order.

(7) The ballots shall take place fourteen days after the approval of the motion allocating chairs to parties.

- (8)
 - (a) Nominations of candidates shall be in writing and shall be received by the Clerk of the House by 5.00 pm on the day before the ballot.
 - (b) Each nomination shall consist of a signed statement made by the candidate declaring his willingness to stand for election, accompanied by the signatures of fifteen Members elected to the House as members of the same party as the candidate or ten per cent. of the Members elected to the House as members of that party, whichever is the lower.
 - (c) Statements may be accompanied by signatures of up to five Members elected to the House as members of any party other than that to which the candidate belongs, or members of no party.
 - (d) No Member may sign the statement of more than one candidate for chair of the same select committee.
 - (e) No Member may be a candidate for the chair of a select committee which has not been allocated to his party under paragraph (3) of this order or otherwise, or for which he is ineligible under Standing Order No. 122A (Term limits for chairs of select committees).
 - (f) No Member may be a candidate for the chair of the Committee of Public Accounts unless his party is that of the official Opposition.
 - (g) No Member may be a candidate for more than one chair elected under this order.
 - (h) As soon as practicable following the close of nominations, lists of the candidates and their accompanying signatories shall be published.

(9) Election of chairs of select committees under this order shall be by secret ballot.

(10) Preparatory arrangements for the ballots shall be made under the supervision of the Clerk of the House.

- (11) (a) If there is only one candidate for the chair of a select committee, that candidate shall be declared elected without a ballot.
- (b) The ballot shall take place in a place appointed by the Speaker.
- (c) Each Member intending to vote shall be provided with a ballot paper for each select committee bearing the names of the candidates listed in alphabetical order.
- (d) Members will vote by ranking as many candidates as they wish in order of preference, marking 1 by the name of their first preference, 2 by the name of their second preference, and so on. Any candidate who receives more than half the first preferences shall be elected. If no candidate is so elected, the candidate or candidates with the lowest number of first preferences shall be eliminated and their votes distributed among the remaining candidates according to the preferences on them. If no candidate has more than half the votes, the process of elimination and distribution is repeated, until one candidate has more than half the votes.
- (e) The ballot shall be open between 10.00 am and 5.00 pm and counting shall take place under arrangements made by the Clerk of the House.

(12) The Speaker shall have power to give directions on any matter of doubt arising from the conduct of a ballot or from an individual ballot paper and to vary the timings given in paragraphs (6) to (11) of this order.

(13) As soon as practicable after the closing of the ballot the results shall be published under the direction of the Speaker.

(14) A chair elected under this order is a member of the committee of which he is elected chair.

Source: House of Commons, [Standing Orders of the House of Commons – Public Business 2011](#), December 2010, HC 700 2010-11